EDUCATION IN ALBANIA: CHANGING ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Education reform has become an extraordinarily important issue for Albania, as it from a closed, centrally planned economy to a global market economy, and from a closed, authoritarian political regime to one that is more open. In modern economies, the level and quality of education affects the probability of finding employment and level of earnings. Education increases social mobility, since more educated people have greater chances of receiving on the job training. Conversely, in modern economies, lack of education is an important determinant of poverty. Thus, inequities in educational opportunity contribute to structural poverty as poor, rural, or otherwise disadvantaged groups find themselves excluded from one of the most important means of social integration and economic advancement.

Education also plays a central role in shaping national ideology and identity and notions of citizenship. Attempts to reform the education system must therefore factor in a range of explicit and implicit values and attitudes, in addition to importing cutting edge practices in curriculum development, methods of evaluation, and forms of community involvement which may not be appropriate to the sociocultural context. Finally, and very importantly given the fragile political relations and the ever-present danger of nationalist conflict in the Balkan region, education has the potential to mitigate or exacerbate the myths and stereotypes that contribute to conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study, based on a case study of twelve schools, contributes to the sector study on Albanian education. Its main objective was to understand the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers, parents and principals. The school community forms the primary unit of analysis; sites were selected to represent diversity, in terms of geography; local economies; ethnicity and/or religion; socioeconomic level of the community; degree of social and economic heterogeneity. Three teams of local interviewers, supervised by social scientists from the University of Tirana, conducted focus groups and interviews with principals, teachers, students, parents, and key community informants regarding needs, priorities, and expectations regarding the education process and the relationships between stakeholders, schools, and the community. A second part, not yet completed, seeks to confirm or disconfirm findings, and prioritize problems and suggestions.

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION

Education systems reflect and reaffirm the basic organization of the society and its important values. Albania is experiencing a deep crisis, and virtually every aspect of the education system reflects this crisis. Ongoing political instability and dysfunctional state institutions; the impact of political and economic crises on local struggles for power and economic gain; the enormous gap in opportunity between urban and rural communities; and the impact of drug trafficking, prostitution, and organized crime have deeply affected attitudes and expectations toward education, as well as the day-to-day
functioning of the education system. In parts of the country, ongoing insecurity has strengthened the role of extended families and traditional law, kaman, which has re-emerged, particularly in the northeast, to compensate for weak or dysfunctional state institutions.

The importance of bounded social groups: Aside from the approximately 40,000 ethnic Greeks remaining in the country, and small Vlach and Roma communities, Albania is ethnically relatively homogeneous. Likewise, despite a mixed Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic population, religious distinctions do not play a significant role. The most important social groups are based on the extended family, neighbors, and close friends. Trust is reserved for insiders, while "outsiders" are regarded with suspicion. This polarization is reflected and rooted in local notions of honor and alliances which call for complete loyalty to one's own group while legitimating suspicion and hostility to those outside the group. People who violate the rules of group cohesion, change sides, or begin to think critically, as well as anonymous strangers, public spaces (including state buildings) or abstract projects, can become the legitimate targets of violence.

The lack of cross-cutting social groups: Social groups function as supportive communities within which people use their social capital to mobilize support for their aims. In 1997, for example, such groups mobilized populations to protect the local schools. While social networks are dense within groups, they do not cut across social cleavages in ways that encourage collaboration around shared social goals, or enhance the development of civil society. Indeed, the closed groups and suspicion of outsiders promotes a pervasive distrust and suspicion of conspiracy and distrust, and one heightened by tendencies of groups to affiliate with one of the two major political parties, for the purpose of obtaining and securing certain kinds of employment with the state. The politicization and personalization of education appointments promotes short rather than long-term planning, personal insecurity among staff, and a culture of distrust.

THE IMPACT OF CIVIL INSTABILTY AND DISORDER

General insecurity: The events of 1991 and 1997 created a strong sense of general insecurity that continues to affect the daily life of young people and their participation in school. Rural Informants noted the insecurity related to property conflicts, the growing role of criminal gangs in Fier and Korca that emerged in 1997, and the spread of weapons. Parents, fearful that their boys will become involved in illegal activities (drugs, smuggling, and gang activity), and that girls will be harassed, raped, or kidnapped, particularly tend to restrict the activities of girls.

How schools attempt to confront insecurity: Unfortunately, these dangers have penetrated into schools, sometimes in the form of unemployed local youth who disrupt classes, but also in the form of drug use and distribution and even prostitution. Schools have tried with mixed success to externalize problems by expelling offending students and building walls, but many students and parents felt that schools had been largely ineffectual in helping them deal with the ever-present risks youth face. Students felt that schools should educate them more actively about these issues. Although some teachers had organized seminars and lectures, students criticized them for dealing with issues in the abstract rather than tackling the concrete problems that plagued their school.
BEFORE AND AFTER 1991: CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION

_Schools are view as part of the state rather than the community:_ Prior to the socialist period, schools did not even exist in villages. It was only under Hoxha that public buildings such as schools and community buildings, or “houses of culture,” were built. Schools also served as a venue for Communist Party organizing meetings and polling stations. Given the association of the school buildings with Hoxha’s regime, many informants interpreted the destruction, vandalism and looting of schools in 1991 as a manifestation of the populations’ accumulated hatred for the dictatorship. Because schools remained politicized, with personnel policy often decided according to political affiliation, they were again attacked after the collapse of the pyramid schemes, partly as a form of revenge against the state for its failure to prevent the massive defrauding of the population. Informants also noted that in some impoverished rural areas, theft and vandalism are also linked to a low valuation on education in general.

_Loss of confidence in the present education system:_ Most informants recalled the security, stability and order that characterized the educational system. Material conditions were good, teachers received living wages (600-800 lek a month, compared to 300 lek for workers), and felt respected and socially valued. Teachers recalled that they were more motivated, not only because material conditions were better, but also because students were more engaged. Before 1991, schools had organized many cultural and sports events in which students enjoyed participating. For the parents, these activities meant that their children had spent free time productively rather than being tempted, as now, by the new pool halls and bingo games.

After 1991, schools lost prestige, according to informants, because people observed that a good education was no longer prerequisite to a good income, and that university educated people were earning less than small businessmen. The events of 1997 further undermined peoples’ confidence in the stability of their country. The predominant attitude toward the school system as of this study is one of denigration, particularly when informants contrasted European with Albanian educational system. Ambitious parents sought to hire tutors, if possible enroll their children in private schools, or even send them to high school or university abroad.

_Private schools viewed as superior:_ Most respondents believed that the new private schools that have emerged in most cities offer a superior education, because they were well-equipped materially, tended to hire on merit, and recruit teachers competent in new methodologies. They were also more responsive to the demands of students and parents, and more independent of the Ministry. Parents also felt private schools offered more security and safety. Most informants were convinced that private education gave students much better chances of university admission and employment. Informants had mixed feeling about implications for equity. Such respondents felt strongly that it would be better to improve public education in Albania before encouraging the development of private schooling. Otherwise the private schools would only hasten the deterioration of the public school system by siphoning off the best teachers and students.
THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

*The catastrophic learning environment:* Since 1991, the damage wreaked on many public schools has been compounded by lack of maintenance and interruptions in electricity and water supply. Schools now function with damaged doors, broken windows, leaking roofs, and non-functioning toilets. The significant rural-urban migration has put a severe strain on urban schools, where classes must often accommodate between 40 to 50 students. Both rural and urban teachers found that overcrowding made it more difficult to get through the teaching material and involve all the students, and made it harder for them to deal with disruptive students.

*Problems of maintaining qualified teaching staff:* By all accounts, education has declined drastically in quality, and much of the decline is to the loss of qualified and experienced teachers and demotivation of many remaining teachers. They considered low salaries played a greater role than working conditions, lack of teaching materials, or lack of safety. Particularly in rural areas, the Ministry of Education has hired unqualified teachers, some of whom had only a high school diploma or a few years of university. Remaining teachers have been forced to supplement meager incomes with second jobs. This, in turn, has deflected energy from teaching, and in some cases, has led to abuse, when teachers pressured students in their own classes to pay them for private lessons.

*Few teachers have introduced new teaching methods:* Despite fewer constraints than in the past regarding teaching methods, most teachers continue to rely on lecturing rather eliciting or incorporating students’ opinions or preferences into the teaching process. Memorization and recollection of facts, rather than interpretation or evaluation, constitutes “learning.” Most students, however, found this approach boring and oppressive. Many criticized teachers as too authoritarian, and unresponsive to their needs and interests. Despite the desire of many teachers to learn new methods, in-service teacher training is in a state of confusion. The Ministry of Education had initiated a new training program in 1998, but structure and plans for implementing it are still reportedly lacking in many regions. Soros is an important provider of in-service training, yet many teachers were unable to attend courses held in Tirana, and felt that the training did not always address their real needs.

*Dissatisfaction with textbooks and curricula:* The quality of textbooks constitutes another issue in the classroom. Teachers and students criticized them for being theoretically overburdened, written in difficult, dense language, and being so poorly produced that charts and illustrations were unreadable. Teachers criticized the contents of some of the humanitarian textbooks as too politicized, reflecting the particular ideologies of the party in power at the moment. Informants also criticized the curricula for being overloaded, and too rigid to allow students to develop their own preferences or abilities. They also felt it did not reflect demands of the market economy. Moreover, middle school and high school curricula were not coordinated, and middle school students entered high school unprepared for the course demands. Parents and teachers felt high schools did not adequately prepare students for university exams. Parents in particular felt that the need to take private lessons as preparation reflected this inadequacy and the lack of connection between secondary and higher education. Most expected school to provide specific training for specific jobs. Students, in particular, were anxious for training in subjects that would help them find work. They noted that even when qualified teachers taught more practical courses, they lacked the experience to provide real hands-on training. Even more critically, most schools, especially rural ones, lacked equipment such as computers and even basic equipment.
INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: 
THE “SCHOOL COLLECTIVE”

The rift between school and “community”: It was difficult to discuss the relationship between the school and the “community” in this study, since there was little consensus among informants on the meaning of this concept. The tendency to interpret the “school community” as either a self-contained entity – the school collective – or as a geographic concept, derives in part from the fact that the school is still seen as part of the state apparatus. The replacement of principals each time a new minister is appointed further reinforces perceptions of the school as closer to the state apparatus rather than to the community, be this defined as the school collective or the neighborhood.

Some foreign organizations and NGOs, including the Soros Foundation, are trying to narrow the gap between communities and schools by promoting community involvement when they build schools, or requiring communities to match funds for specific projects. Principals, teachers, and parents, particularly in urban areas, have sought to twin their schools with schools in Italy, Greece, France and elsewhere in Europe as a way to improve the quality of teaching and acquire material help.

Discontent at the top-down organization of education: Principals, teachers, and parents expressed discontent over Ministerial control over curriculum, staffing, and textbooks, suggesting that rigidity suggested that the Ministry was afraid to try new approaches to education. Some teachers felt Ministry personnel were in fact out of touch with the reality of local schools. Private schools suffer less from ministerial control.

The limited authority of principals and teachers: Most principals chafed at the stringent limits to their formal authority, particularly over budget and personnel issues. Their main job is to manage and coordinate the day-to-day affairs of the school, including issues of discipline and attendance. At the same time, principals informally exerted considerable efforts to raise funds from parents, sponsors, NGOs, or to procure supplies or services through personal connections. A few respondents felt that principals obtained jobs based on political affiliation, and undermined or criticized teachers unfairly based on political ties. Teachers particularly lacked input into the education process, as well as a regular forum for discussion aside from the two party-affiliated teaching unions. Aside from organizing sporadic strikes, the unions were not very active in promoting educators’ interests, most informants felt.

The circumscribed role of parents: Neither parents or school staff felt that parents should involve themselves in issues of curriculum or teaching. There was consensus that parents should take full responsibility for their child’s behavior, ensure that the child arrives at school well-dressed, well-fed, well-behaved, and prepared to absorb the lessons of the day. School staff expected parents to take an active interest in their children’s academic progress, and show willingness to help the child deal with difficulties. Formally, and as continuation of socialist era patterns, parents’ contact with teachers consisted of monthly meetings at which teachers brought up problems of school performance, absenteeism, or poor behavior. When possible, parents sought to establish personal relations with school staff, to minimize poor treatment and encourage more positive (or even preferential) treatment of their children. Even in terms of bilateral relationships between teachers and families, lack of transportation rural and peri-urban communities means that parents are unable to easily visit the
school and establish relationships with their children's teachers, or that commuting teachers are not available after school hours.

**Parent councils and boards:** In most of the studied schools, formal relationships between parents and the teaching staff (including the principal) also take place through elected councils, and boards (usually appointed). For councils in public schools, the most important function appeared to be fundraising (often through personal donations). Other school staff acknowledged that the parent-teacher councils were purely formal. The majority of interviewed parents were not only unaware of how the parent councils worked, some felt that they were uninformed about appropriate procedures for dealing with the different kinds of problems that might arise. For the most part, because schools have so many financial problems, principals and teachers forthrightly stated that they preferred to recruit highly educated and/or well-to-do parents or “businessmen” to the parent boards, because they are more willing to help financially. Parents’ cash and in-kind contributions were an important source of assistance for schools. Even though this assistance was not always systematic and substantial, most schools relied on it.

**The student government initiative:** Some schools have inaugurated student governments, mainly under the guidance of the Soros Foundation. The governments, to which each class sends “senators,” are supposed to serve as conduits through which students can lodge formal complaints about teachers, or make suggestions about activities or excursions to the school principal. The governments also have a mandate to organize debates and discussions about social issues concerning youth, such as substance abuse, crime, and prostitution. According to teachers, parents, and students in schools were governments had been established, they were not particularly effective, in part because students were afraid to use the governments to make complaints, because they feared retaliation from teachers. In addition, schools lacked funds to realize students’ suggestions for activities.

**ACCESS AND EQUITY: GROWING EXCLUSION**

The socialist regime accomplished much in the way of bringing education to underserved areas and populations, and raising the general educational level of the population. The partial collapse of the education system since the end of socialism has begun to reverse this trend and contributed to inequity and marginalization of some groups.

**Declining access for the poor:** Although public education remains free, students from poor families face a number of educational barriers. Even in urban areas, schools vary in quality. It is the more prosperous or well-connected parents who are able to pull strings and violate local regulations to enroll their children in the best schools. Poor children were less able to purchase textbooks, and more likely to come to class without supplies or to share them with others. Poor children were less able to take private lessons, either prepare for university exams or for jobs requiring computer skills and foreign languages. Families perceived this as a huge disadvantage, and felt that without lessons, their children’s chances for entering university were zero.

**The impact of migration on boys' education:** One of the most visible impacts of poverty on youth has been the pressure on boys to leave school. They either drop out, or are pulled out by the parents, to earn money. In some areas, boys leave to help parents with agriculture, stockbreeding, or construction work. The majority go abroad, mainly to Greece or Italy. Some poor families have
prioritized their daughters' education, sending boys abroad to work so they could at least afford to keep their daughters in school. Such parents explained that they saw education as their daughters' only chances to obtain employment, while boys had more options.

**Disadvantages of rural schools:** Students living in rural regions are at a serious disadvantage compared to urban counterparts. Some village students walk up to 2 hours each way on narrow, unpaved and rutted roads. Far from the centers of power, rural schools tend to be in worse condition than urban ones. They have lost qualified teachers and are the least able to recruit new ones, particularly in special areas such foreign languages. They are more poorly equipped and they have less access to contemporary teaching materials. They also have less ability to raise and mobilize resources, because local populations are, for the most part, poorer than the more heterogeneous urban populations. The distribution system for textbooks and other materials also works poorly in rural areas.

**Attitudes of teaching staff toward rural youth:** In rural communities, the rate of students continuing higher education is much lower than in urban areas. In part, this was attributed to the disdainful and discouraging attitude teachers showed to rural students. Rural students felt that teachers tended to pass poorly performing students, mainly those from villages, to get rid of them and avoid dealing with them the following year. They also felt that urban teachers who commuted to the village to teach tended to dismiss rural students as incapable no matter how interested or capable they were, and did not provide any sort of help to those who were interested in higher education. For their part, educators found that village parents were less interested in their children's education and rarely contacted the school. They attributed parental noninvolvement to a rural mentality that placed little emphasis on education. These parents neither attended the regular monthly meetings between teachers and parents, nor made financial contributions to improve the environment of their children's school.

**Rural migrants are at particular risk of exclusion:** With the new freedom of movement, migrants have been leaving isolated mountain villages for urban areas. In many cities, the migrants have settled in peri-urban, semi-squatter communities, such as Kamza or Bathore outside Tirana, where they form distinctive communities. The intensive and rapid character of the migration has given receiving communities little time in which to adapt to and accept the "newcomers." Moreover, town and city populations tend to judge the migrants, particularly those from the northeastern districts, as backward, ignorant, uncivilized, prone to feuding and violence. Teachers, principals, parents, and students characterized migrant youth from the northeast as poorly prepared academically, unmotivated in school, and most likely to drop out.

Teaching staff voiced overt dislike of these migrant "outsiders," and felt that they had neither the time nor financial incentive to deal with these difficult and academically unprepared youth. They noted that migrant families had many problems, including unemployment and homelessness, which made it difficult for their children to adjust to their new communities. Some spoke dialects that made it difficult for them to understand the more literary Albanian that the teachers spoke; many had serious reading and writing deficiencies from rural schools. The "outsiders" clearly felt uncomfortable in their new surroundings, were not particularly welcomed by the local population, and therefore tended to socialize only with each other.
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER

*Girls increasingly outnumber boys in secondary school:* Gender attitudes among teaching staff and students present a complex picture in which “traditional” and “contemporary,” rural and urban values mingle. Informants were unanimous that girls were more serious and devoted students, more well-behaved in the classroom, but equally ambitious as boys. Because so many boys, particularly from poor families, had dropped out to assist parents with agricultural work, or migrate abroad for work, girls outnumbered boys in most high schools, as well as among those aspiring to university.

*Attitudes and obstacles to girls’ higher education:* Differences in urban and rural norms and expectations affect attitudes toward girls’ higher education. Urban parents were likelier to declare that girls and boys had the same ability and right to pursue their education. Urban informants felt education was particularly important for girls, because they would be models for their families, and teaching and social sciences.

In small towns, informants noted that although almost all of the girls wanted to continue their schooling, some families “still held onto the old mentality” and pressured them to marry instead. In poor rural areas in particular, it was not uncommon for poor families to pressure daughters to marry at age 15 or 16, to lighten their family’s economic burden, and that marriage became a reason for girls to leave school. Even those who become engaged tend to remain at home after finishing school, because their fiancés could countenance the idea that they would leave the village, or mingle with other men in university classrooms. While boys can go abroad to work and save money for university, girls are much more restricted by their families, girls from poor families, especially in rural areas, had fewer possibilities to earn the money to pay for their education. By the same token, girls were more limited in their choice of institutes of higher learning, either preferring or being required to stay in their home community.

FINDINGS

The school and community

• Stakeholders largely view schools as institutions divorced from the “community,” and functioning primarily as agents of the state.

• Given the top-down, hierarchical organization of education, school “collectives,” principals, and teachers feel they have insufficient autonomy or authority.

• Schools do not serve any function in the community, except for educating the youth.

• Most school-level stakeholders feel they have very little voice in the education process.

• Parents also lack voice in the education system.

• One of the greatest concerns for all stakeholders is the continuing lack of security and safety.

• Students from poor families are at a severe disadvantage in schools.
• Rural students, both poor and non-poor, form a cross-cutting category of disadvantaged students.

• The most overtly excluded students in our study were from families that have migrated from the impoverished, rural districts, usually in the northeast, into larger cities and students living in remote villages who go to schools in neighboring villages or towns.

• While Roma were not discussed by any of our stakeholders, they also constitute an impoverished and marginalized group.

• The gender balance in schools has shifted dramatically as a result of migration.

The classroom experience

• Schools have not yet recovered from the devastating impact in 1991 and 1997 in terms of physical damage or the morale of teaching staff and students, and their poor condition deeply affects the education experience.

• Students and parents felt the curriculum was overloaded, while its content did not prepare students for the labor market or allow them to develop and pursue their own interests.

• Most teachers continue to be guided by a traditional philosophy of teaching that inculcates respect for authority through distant and hierarchical behavior.

• Although education has been officially "de-ideologized," the production and content of social science and humanities textbooks remains politicized, and the content appears to emerge from party-related pressures to promote one or the other interpretation of history and society.

• Teaching staff acknowledged that their schools lacked systematic contacts with other schools, whether with the schools which fed into them, or the schools or institutes of higher education to which their students were likely to move.

How teachers cope: the education system's "shadow economy"

• One of the most serious blows to the Albanian education system has been the large exodus of qualified and experienced teachers.

• Tutoring has allowed many teachers to continue working in their profession, by allowing them to supplement meager salaries by working at convenient hours.

• Teachers are able to use their positions in the state school system to create a "market" for their services, either by creating a reputation for excellence, or by overtly threatening to fail students
• Tutoring provides an affordable alternative to expensive private education, but has the potential to accentuate inequities

RECOMMENDATIONS

Designing educational reform

• Education reform projects should be designed in close collaboration with reform projects in other sectors.

• Given the particularity of Albanian conditions, as well as long-traditions of public non-involvement, detailed recommendations must be developed in close collaboration with stakeholders.

Transparency and accountability

• Measures to increase transparency and accountability are critical for building trust in a society characterized by endemic suspicions of outsiders, and should accompany all stages of the reform process.

• Any reform project should build in mechanisms for extensive and ongoing information-sharing

Rebuilding and rehabilitating schools

• Reform should combine a significant bricks and mortar component with community building.

• Curriculum and textbook reform

• Middle and secondary school curricula, course content and quality should be brought in line with market and university demands, with due regard for local and individual needs and priorities.

• Secondary schools should coordinate more closely with universities, to ensure that university-bound students are receiving the appropriate preparation for university entrance.

• Textbook production would benefit from the increased participation of teachers, who have day to day experience in using them. Textbook production should be closely linked to curriculum reform, so that textbooks for each class build upon the knowledge that students are expected to have from their previous class.

• Possibly in conjunction with parallel projects in judicial reform, health reform, and others, the schools should more directly address the critical social problems that most worry students and families.

• Given the critical ideological importance that social science and literature textbooks in particular will play in shaping attitudes of young Albanians toward their neighbors, it is important that educators rethink the basic lessons in close discussion with their peers in neighboring countries.
Teaching quality and professional development

• To attract talented university graduates to teaching, to retain experienced teachers, and importantly, to reduce incentives for teachers to become involved in demanding second jobs or to abuse their authority by demanding bribes, teaching salaries must be raised.

• In-service teacher training should be provided, not only to raise skill levels, but provide an additional incentive for teachers and students

Institutional relationships and responsibilities

• Education positions should be more professionalized (through special courses for principals, for example) and depoliticized (by publishing criteria, advertising jobs, and opening the hiring and firing process to greater scrutiny), so that administrators and teachers feel secure in their jobs, and less prone to intimidation from their superiors, or from parents.

• To take on greater responsibilities, principals and vice principals should receive training in school management, fundraising, budgeting and efficient use of resources.

• Parent-teacher councils, parent boards, and student governments should be encouraged, but with due regard to local expectations about what parents and/or students stakeholders think is appropriate and desirable

Increasing equity and access

• While closing small, run-down and ill-equipped rural schools may be cost-effective, such rationalization should be accompanied by measures that ensure that the access of rural children to school is maintained or improved.

• Measures must be taken to restore the access of rural children to higher education, to counter the growing disparity between urban and rural children.

• The severe marginalization of rural migrants in cities, as well as of Roma, require a proactive attempt, possibly by means of extensive NGO-assisted outreach and remedial education and focused teacher training, to break the cycle of exclusion and self-exclusion.

• It will be critical to carefully monitor trends in Albanian education, as well as the impact of new measures, for the ongoing evaluation and improvement of reform. Areas to be monitored would include equity and access, Forms and degree of community; sense of ownership and satisfaction; and transparency and accountability.
INTRODUCTION

Education reform has become an extraordinarily important issue for Albania. More than 40 percent of the population is school age, which means that the vast majority of Albanian families are involved in the school system. With the move from a closed, centrally planned economy to a global market economy, and from a closed, authoritarian political regime to one that is more open, Albanians desperately need new skills to cope with change. And finally, considering the many supporting activities such as construction and maintenance of schools, production of textbooks and other teaching materials, and pedagogical training and research, education forms an important sector of the economy.

In modern economies, the level and quality of education affects the probability of finding employment and level of earnings. Education increases social mobility, since more educated people have greater chances of receiving on the job training. Conversely, in modern economies, lack of education is an important determinant of poverty. Thus, inequities in educational opportunity contribute to structural poverty as poor, rural, or otherwise disadvantaged groups find themselves excluded from one of the most important means of social integration and economic advancement.

Education also plays a central role in shaping national ideology and identity and notions of citizenship. Attempts to reform the education system must therefore factor in a range of explicit and implicit values and attitudes, in addition to importing cutting edge practices in curriculum development, methods of evaluation, and forms of community involvement which may not be appropriate to the sociocultural context. Finally, and very importantly given the fragile political relations and the ever-present danger of nationalist conflict in the Balkan region, education has the potential to mitigate or exacerbate the myths and stereotypes that contribute to conflict.

A brief history of the education system in Albania

In examining the current educational system, it is useful to consider the fact that Albania did not have a national system before this century, although by 1870, over a thousand Greek language schools functioned in southern Albania. During this period, schools were funded by religious organizations outside the empire, with the agreement of the Ottoman rulers. However, the Ottomans forbid writing and printing in Albanian, and despite a well-educated and literate elite, 80 percent of the population remained illiterate. Only in the 1870s were the first Albanian language schools, part of the
nationalist awakening, founded in Korea, first for boys, then for girls. It was not until 1920, some eight years after Albanian independence, that King Zog's government created a national school system. By 1955, with the expansion of schools to rural areas and introduction of adult education, illiteracy was said to have been eradicated for Albanians under 40. However, students still traveled abroad for higher education, because the first university in Albania was not established until 1957, when a number of institutes of higher education were joined to form the State University of Tirana.¹ During the 1950s, Soviet education practices served as a model for Albania, but after the Sino-Soviet split, Albania shifted allegiance to China with consequences for the education system. New universities were established, and the workload for students almost doubled. The Albanian Academy of Sciences, where research was conducted, was established in 1971. When China withdrew its support in 1978, the education system became further isolated, and materially and intellectually impoverished.

Nevertheless, the accomplishments of the socialist regime (1944-1991) cannot be ignored. By 1990, preschool enrollments were around 60 percent; there was full enrollment in basic education (grades 1-8), and 80 percent in high school.² According to 1996 LSMS figures, about 45 percent of the population aged 25-35 had at least completed higher secondary education.³ According to the recent World Education Indicators, these results are better than non-OECD member.⁴ At the same time, education was narrowly targeted to the production needs of a closed economy and the ideological needs of a particularly isolated socialist state. This focus seriously limited the ability of the education system to provide youth with appropriate skills for the radically new world in which they now find themselves.

Highest level of education achieved by individuals, by age group

**METHODOLOGY**

**Objectives**

This study is intended to complement other components of the sector study on Albanian education by focusing on the role of the school in society. Our main objective was to understand the experiences and perspectives of people most closely involved in the education system—students and teachers, parents and principals. We therefore chose to rely on the case-study method, choosing regions and schools to incorporate as much range and diversity as possible.

Taking the school community as the unit of analysis, the study addresses the following issues: how does education fit into the specific social, cultural, political and economic context of contemporary Albania, and how do cultural attitudes, values and practices shape the expectations and behavior of the beneficiaries and providers of education. The study examines different aspects of the educational


² Basic education is carried out in elementary schools, which cover grades 1-4, and middle schools (grades 5-8). With the exception of small villages which lack middle schools, elementary and middle schools are usually located in a single building in most towns and cities they usually. High schools (grades 9-12), however, are usually housed separately, with the exception of village agricultural high schools, which used to be in the same building as the other schools, with a separate entrance for the youngest pupils. Kindergartens (for children 3-5), do not exist in villages. In the past, only urban public sector workers had access to kindergartens, but now only private kindergartens function.


experience, including problems of access and equity for different social groups—rural versus urban youth and boys versus girls. It looks at the impact of political and social change, including dysfunctional institutions, lack of public order, and new patterns of migration and emigration. The report strives as much as possible to place the findings from the data in their social and cultural context.

Research design and fieldwork

The study began with a review of background literature on Albania and interviews with key informants in Washington, with officials from ministries of education and labor, pedagogical experts, representatives of NGOs working in education, local officials, and others in Tirana, about socialist-era educational practice and current issues in education. Based on this preliminary work, we designed a study to consist of two parts. Part One comprises eleven in-depth case studies of schools chosen from different regions in the country. Each case study consists of interviews with members of the major stakeholder groups: teachers, principals, parents, and students, as well as with key community informants (local officials, informal leaders, representatives of donor organizations working in education, and so forth). Detailed interview guides developed for each of the stakeholder groups and key informants were submitted to Albanian counterparts for discussion, and revised based on their comments and those of the World Bank task team working on the sector study.

The second part, not yet completed, will involve a rapid survey of twenty additional schools. This survey will consist of three focus group discussions at each school, using a discussion guide based on key findings from the case studies. The aim is to confirm or disconfirm the findings, and to ask focus group participants to assign a priority to each issue and suggest concrete solutions.

Fieldwork was carried out by three teams of graduate students from Tirana University, each team supervised by a social scientist or education specialist from the university. The teams were trained in the classroom and during fieldwork in the pilot phase in Tirana. Each team submitted detailed reports consisting of four narrative sections, each of which summarized the views of a separate stakeholder group on key issues. In addition, team leaders submitted separate reports synthesizing interviews with key community informants, as well as brief profiles of each village, town or city in which case studies were undertaken.

Selection of sites and informants

Based on preliminary discussions, we chose twelve schools in different parts of Albania to maximize diversity in terms of geography; local economies; ethnicity and/or religion; socioeconomic level of the community; degree of social and economic heterogeneity; and school characteristics. The studied schools included middle and high schools, schools with a vocational branch, a Greek language school, and a private school. They are located in Tirana and nearby rural Kamza; Shkodra, Rreshen, and Bushat in the north; at Pogradec, and Gjirokastra, Fier, and Korca in southern Albania. (Please see Annex I for a description of schools and sites). In each school, the study teams interviewed (i) the principal or vice-principal; (ii) two to four teachers, including men and women of different ages and from different communities of origin (local or new to the community), and including when possible teachers of history, civics, or other social science teachers; (iii) two to four students, boys and girls, some of who planned to pursue their education after graduation and others who did not; and (iv) two to four mothers and/or fathers interviewed in their home, chosen to include a diversity of ages, and...
educational and occupational levels.

In each community, the team leaders met with local officials and leaders, formal and informal, as well as specialists or experts (international and local) to gather basic social data, including population figures and information on migration, a brief history of the community, including recent events and socioeconomic conditions that influence life there.
THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT
OF EDUCATION

Education systems reflect and reaffirm the basic organization of the society and its important values. Albania is experiencing a deep crisis, and virtually every aspect of the education system reflects this crisis. This section provides a context for understanding the most important issues of the social environment and their impact on education. Important issues include: the impact of post-socialist political instability and dysfunctional state institutions; the impact of political and economic crises on local struggles for power and economic gain; the enormous gap in opportunity between urban and rural communities; and the impact of drug trafficking, prostitution, and organized crime.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

North-south differences

While most commentators caution against overplaying north-south distinctions in Albania, it is worth mentioning some historical distinctions that remain important. While extended families were important throughout Albania, large, patrilineal and patriarchal families played the strongest role in the less accessible, highland northern regions, where Ottoman state institutions barely penetrated. In the absence of state power, the kanun, a code of clan-based law, historically regulated property rights and access to resources, as well as local political and social (including gender) relations within communities. The mountain basin and coastal plains of the south were more open to foreign influences, particularly Greek and Italian. In contrast to the mixed Muslim and Catholic populations of the north, the south was home to wealthy Islamic landowners and Christian Orthodox peasants, entrepreneurs, and professionals, many of whom were educated abroad. Indeed, the communist leadership largely originated in the south. North-south differences were manifest not only in social organization and religion, but also in spoken dialects.¹

Reinvention of tradition – the kanun

In the north, although many aspects of the kanun, particularly those of honor, alliance, and patriarchy remained important, blood revenge, a rule-bound mode of conflict resolution, was suppressed
during the Hoxha regime. Today, as people to the severe weakening of state institutions, introduction of new property relations, and emergence of new power alignments, local contenders for power have deliberately revived the *kanun* to support their ambitions. In northern districts such as Shkodra and Mirdite, once-powerful families are taking advantage of post-Hoxha instability to reassert their authority and influence, sometimes by means of blood revenge catalyzed by privatization-related land and property disputes. The south, where many emigrants had invested money earned abroad, and consequently lost greater amounts in the pyramid schemes, was particularly hard hit in the violence of 1997. There people have increasingly resorted to “traditional” self-defense in the absence of a state capable of maintaining civil order. 

**Religious diversity**

Historically, language more than religion has been the most important national unifying symbol, partly in reaction to the Ottoman's attempt to ban teaching and writing in Albanian. Albania is rather diverse in terms of formal religions, with Catholicism exerting its influence mainly in the north, Christian Orthodoxy in the South, with Islam exerting a more national influence. Many Albanian Muslims, however, were strongly influenced by the members of the Bektashi sect and became active Albanian nationalists. 

The communist government, however, inaugurated a ruthless policy of suppression against all religions when it took power, considering them potentially divisive, a “Trojan horse” for alien interests and foreign powers, and implicitly anticommunist. Since 1990, however, restrictions have been removed, and religious institutions and representatives have invested considerable resources in reconstructing churches, mosques and religious schools, and in proselytizing. Formed in 1993, the Society of Islamic Intellectuals is now said to have branches in most cities throughout the country. A teacher in Fier, a member of the society, described its aim as resolving disputes between different religious groups. This teacher noted that religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Bahai, and others new to Albania, have been successfully recruiting members among youth. The activities of Islamic Intellectuals in promoting Islamic values along with active cooperation with intellectuals of Albania's two other major religions, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, therefore appears in part to be aimed at limiting the inroads of these other religions.

Nevertheless, at present, formal religious differences do not appear to play much of a role in everyday relationships, partly because religion was so completely suppressed under socialism. Despite the influx of money and influence from the surrounding religious establishments in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Italy, and Greece, not to mention proselytizing from Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Baha'i, and others, informants not only insisted on religious harmony prevailing in the country, but were reluctant to even discuss the possibility of religious tensions—possibly a retention of socialist era fears of religion's potential divisiveness.

The Catholic population is said to be somewhat more strict and less prone to intermarriage.

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7 Hall, 1994. P. 43.

8 Ibid, p. 44-45.
because of the proximity of the influence of the Italian Catholic Church. Yet given the European location and orientation of the country, there has long been a tradition of Muslim families sending their children to Catholic schools. Today, as part of what they perceive as a move toward modernity, people often change Muslim names to Christian ones. In Tirana, some Muslim families baptize their children into the Orthodox religion to facilitate their integration into Europe, and Tirana girls wear crosses as part of western fashion.

“In Albania, 10% of the population is Catholic, 60% is Muslim, 30% is Orthodox and other religions, and 100% have no religion at all.” Key informant, Tirana.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN ALBANIAN SOCIETY

Insiders and outsiders

“Social capital” and “trust” are spoken of as important elements in the process of constructing civil society in post-socialist countries. Data from this study, however, suggest that it is not very useful to look for generalized trust outside the clearly defined limits of social groups based on longstanding ties among kin, friends and neighbors. Anthropologists such as Schwandner-Sievers document the strongly polarized nature of Albanian society today, and the extent to which Albanians divide their social worlds into “insiders,” members of their social group, and “outsiders,” by definition not to be trusted. She notes that although the socialist state vigorously suppressed the power of the patriarchal family and the practice of feuding, it “never succeeded in creating an atmosphere of trust that would allow anyone to believe in anything more than face-to-face relationships. There was no law that guaranteed security to the individual by the state.”

This polarization is reflected and rooted in local notions of honor and alliances (besa) which call for complete loyalty to one’s own group while legitimating suspicion and hostility to those outside the group. People who violate the rules of group cohesion, change sides, or begin to think critically, as well as anonymous strangers, public spaces (including state buildings) or abstract projects, can become the legitimate targets of violence.

“The wolf licks his own flesh and eats the flesh of others.” A saying from the kanun.

This form of social organization has both positive and negative aspects. The closed social groups function as supportive communities within which individuals have considerable social capital. Their social capital consists of the ability to mobilize support of various kinds, including access to important resources. In Pogradec, for example, the interviewed school director noted that local powerful families exerted a positive role in several nearby villages. In Bushat, they mobilized the town population to protect the local school in 1997.


At the same time, the suspicion and hostility toward “outsiders” works against the construction of “community” in Albania. One of the consequences of values of group loyalty and besa has been conflict arising during privatization of land. Such conflict has frequently led to competition and blood revenge between large, extended families. Particularly in the northeast, such conflicts have created a climate of violence and fear throughout affected villages and towns. Fear of retaliation has caused youth to abandon school and go into hiding, either at home or by migrating to large cities or abroad. In addition, strong group structure and group traditions have facilitated the formation of criminal gangs.

A study of social capital and community in Albania found that “community networks… for the most part sustain cooperation within segregated groups… such as extended families, ethnic minorities and particular social economic groups. These networks tend to be dense and strong, but the nature of cooperation in these networks is limited. Different from wider civic engagement networks that cut across social cleavages, these networks do not produce collaboration at a community level, and their impact is weaker. This also explains a contradiction that occurred while analyzing the data. Most of the [interviewees] answered that they trust people in their communities. This would lead us to believe that this indicator of social capital is high. But when asked what they consider as community most of the respondents mentioned their extended families, neighbors, or members of the minority group they identified themselves with.”

Even at the highest levels of state government, this dualistic ideology and suspicion of “the other” profoundly influence contemporary Albanian discourse and behavior. Thus, in his recent resignation speech, Pandeli Majko, the former Prime Minister, cited the “old, outdated, conflicting, and exclusive mentality that still remains a constant element in Albanian politics,” and the disturbing national “climate that produced only a cold war in the ranks of the party I belong to; a climate that taught us to look out for enemies and traitors in our midst, instead of partners and colleagues to share our responsibilities and visions.”

Distrust and the myth of corruption

As we have noted, “generalized trust” can hardly be said to exist in Albanian society. Rather, it is very common to assume that things don’t work as they should, and to use conspiracy theories to explain events. Informants narrated a number of examples of how, when students faced expulsion or received bad grades, their families assumed that teachers were deliberately treating them unfairly either to pressure them for bribes or to favor other students. In such cases, students and families appeared to use prevalent beliefs about prevalent corruption to avoid taking responsibility for unacceptable behavior. This behavior, in turn, contributes to the mistrust between different parties within the given system and even the already pervasive believe that actions are motivated by self-interest alone.

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12 Schwandner-Sievers, 1999.
13 Text of Majko’s press release, provided by the World Bank, translated from Radio Tirana Network.
A corollary of the strong separation between insiders and outsiders, the lack of generalized social trust, and the dichotomization of political life, is the lack of associations which bridge divisions between social groups, or between state and society. While many NGOs, for example, do exist, investigation reveals that similar to the government, most operate in a top down manner, and lack accountability. An ORT report from 1995 noted the “virtual lack of any mass-based organizations that have been established from the grassroots up” or any “primary level associations...”

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR ROLE IN DAILY LIFE

This polarization is evident in the actions of the two large political parties, the Socialist Party (now in power) and the Democratic Party of Sali Berisha, each of which is supported by personal and kin-based social groups through which they extend their influence into local governments. At the local level, powerful families that have regained some of their old authority since the fall of Hoxha’s regime, and have aligned themselves with one or the other of these parties. This alignment facilitates the polarization of Albanian life right down to local level institutions, which become microcosms of partisan struggle in the capital.

According to a politician interviewed for this study, traditional kin-based groups do not play such a visible role in cities such as Tirana or Shkodra. Nevertheless, powerful families who have been settled longer in the cities exert considerable power. In Tirana, formerly wealthy families moved into important positions under the Democratic Party and managed to regain old properties and re-establish their wealth. According to a local official in Tirana, members of these old families make up 90 percent of the current municipal council. A similar situation exists in Shkodra, where families whose prominence dates to the last century have reasserted their important role in local political life.

Because affiliation with a political party is important for obtaining and securing certain kinds of employment with the state, most government positions have become political appointments, at least in the eyes of the public. When a new party comes into power, it usually replaces civil servants throughout the government and ministries. Even within the same party, thorough changes in ministry personnel occur when a new minister is appointed. According to a former Minister of Education interviewed for this study, each time a new minister was appointed, and there have been seven ministers since 1991, he replaced most ministry staff, including directors of educational institutes, university department chairs, and even school directors, with loyalists.

As an example of this process, we can look at two northeastern communities in which interviews were carried out. Each was described as being dominated by kin-based social groups which have reasserted the power they exercised in pre-Hoxha times. Since the 1990s, these groups have moved into key positions in the local administration. Each group is affiliated with a political party, and its members dominate positions of importance when “their” party is in power. When Berisha’s Democratic party was in power, for example, members of the group loyal to this party occupied important positions in the education system and the schools. According to our respondents, many of the appointees lacked appropriate skills. For example, the principal of a local high school had only a high school diploma, although 65 percent of the local teachers had graduated university. When the Socialist Party came to power, group members loyal to the Socialists moved into the same positions.

14 Cited in Agolle, p. 27.
Likewise, informants alleged that school staffing was also politicized and personalized, and complained that appointments in their schools were politically motivated. Parents acknowledged using personal connections with officials working in the local Education Directorate or with the principal to enroll their children outside their school district, to ensure better treatment of their child, and to pressure or cajole teachers into passing their children. Gjirokastra teachers reported that in cases of conflicts between parents and teachers over a child’s behavior, they all try to avoid involving the principal. In their view, rather than seeking a just solution, the principal favors certain people, “because there are interests, bribes, and clans” involved.

Despite the divisiveness in Albanian society, frequent informal contact and relationships between people at the commune or village level to some extent mitigate the effect of formal hierarchies. According to Agolli, although official meetings are held behind closed doors, “in small communes people know one another better than in large urban areas and decisions made in meetings are quickly made public on an informal basis. Villages are made up of three or four main clans that have shared same destinies for years and years. This closeness and reciprocity has created a network of communication that makes it hard for local officials to make arbitrary decisions. In communes the word travels fast in contrast to urban areas, where a formal communication network, such as media, needs to be used to reach out [to] the public.”15

15 Agolli, P. 19.
THE IMPACT OF CIVIL INSTABILITY AND DISORDER

CIVIL CONFLICT AND RISING CRIME

The events of 1991 and 1997 created a strong sense of general insecurity that continues to affect the daily life of young people and their participation in school. People in rural regions, such as Bushat, mentioned the atmosphere of insecurity related to property conflicts, particularly concerning land and water rights, which had led to killings. In Fier and Korca, interviewees stressed the important role of criminal gangs that emerged in 1997 and terrorized the population by acts of robbery, kidnapping, and rape. Korca parents noted that since most people are now armed, most conflicts are solved with weapons, making life extremely insecure. In Shkodra, informants said that in winter, no one is on the streets after 4 or 5 p.m., and parents continue to accompany their girls to school. Many parents voiced particular anger at the police, whom they felt did not do their jobs properly, and at the “corrupt courts,” which, when people were arrested, soon turned them loose again.

“Life in Fier has been risky since 1997. The gangs, which were founded then started raping, kidnapping, and robbing. The main reason these gangs flourished is the chaos in the police department. If the state had stronger control over internal affairs, most problems the gangs caused would be eliminated.” Teachers in Fier.

Criminalization of the economy in the form of drug trafficking, prostitution, and smuggling, contributes to the atmosphere of insecurity and danger surrounding young people and schools. Indeed, according to international law enforcement officials, the size and organization of Albanian criminal groups has increased exponentially since the liberalization of the country in 1991. Criminal gangs, many of whose members have been recruited among unemployed youth, engage in drug and refugee smuggling, arms trafficking, contract killing, kidnapping, visa forgery, and theft. This criminal network has profited from the vast amount of aid that entered the country, the civil war in Yugoslavia, which offered opportunities in smuggling, and opportunities to take over the war-disrupted heroin trade for which Yugoslavia had been a transit point.16

Criminal life in many cities was described as dominated by rival gangs. Life in Korca, for example, has been deeply affected by two rival gangs—allegedly augmented by youth who broke out of prison during the 1997 unrest—which smuggle marijuana, harvested in surrounding villages, through

the Kapshtice customs post to Greece. Even youth not directly involved in such activities are affected. For example, because of the state’s weakness, once or twice a month, criminal gangs in the village of Lazaret, a ten minute drive from Gjirokastra, block the roads in order to loot people coming through the customs point on the Greek border. Although school children are not particularly targeted, they are unable to attend school when this happens.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

In some cases, students or school-age youth become caught up in criminal activity. According interviewees in the south, some students are involved in drug distribution in schools. Teachers in Pogradec alleged that smuggling contraband across the Albanian-Macedonian border has become one option for making money for boys who drop out of school. Teachers in Gjirokastra noted that even rich youth, in some cases encouraged by their parents, have become involved in illicit activities such as selling forged documents. The drug traffic has reportedly contributed to an increase in the number of young drug users. A parent, employed as a nurse, commented on the numbers of overdosed students she had seen arrive in her hospital. According to some informants, those involved in distribution are older students, while users are found among younger students.

Reports of kidnapping and forced prostitution create a frightening atmosphere for girls. In one school, two girls had been “cheated by their fiancés,” who had invited them to Italy and forced them into prostitution. In Fier, several schoolgirls were reported to have voluntarily involved themselves in a prostitution ring run by boys in the school. The involvement of young women in prostitution, however, becomes much more serious among university students.

INSECURITY IN THE SCHOOLS

Informants’ fears about crime and the risks it poses for youth strongly influence attitudes and behavior. Since the violent events of 1991 and after, schools have hired guards (often unarmed) and erected walls against outsiders. The principal of Pogradec school complained that although education authorities repeatedly repaired the wall surrounding the school, however, unemployed village youth destroyed it. He described how unemployed youth from several “difficult” villages entered the school, disrupted classes, vandalized the building, and even seized students. On several occasions, the school had summoned police to break up fights between students and village boys. In Fier, Tirana, and Shkodra, police vans now patrol neighborhood of the school.

Sometimes the students themselves introduced the danger. School staff acknowledged that students sometimes came to class with arms, even guns. School staff, however, were too afraid of retaliation to take measures against students for carrying weapons. Recently, even better insulated and elite schools in Tirana have reported a new phenomenon — bomb threats, allegedly made by ill-prepared students who want to disrupt class. According to the school’s principal, there were about ten bomb threats during the academic year. Although the police were notified and the school evacuated, the events heightened student insecurity.
According to the Index Albania, affiliated to Gallup International, almost 61% of 1,500 Albanians interviewed nationwide in 1999 "would support 'a strong hand' that would suppress crime in the present 'chaotic democracy.' Residents of Tirana, where the state exercises more control, were less supportive of authoritarian rule. Only 23% nationwide, however, rejected the idea of authoritarian rule, although they felt a "strong hand" was needed. (Albania news summary, World Bank)

The impact of insecurity on students

Insecurity has affected girls and boys differently. Many parents stressed their fear for their daughters. Today, particularly in the north, pre-socialist practices such as arranged marriages, bride price payment, and kidnapping of brides have been reintroduced, albeit often as covers for contemporary practices of selling young women into prostitution abroad. In urban areas, girls and young women have been forced to retreat into their homes from fear of street and gang violence, traveling to school only in groups of three or four, and curtailing their evening activities.

In Pogradec, attempted rapes by local youth caused parents to keep their girls at home for some time. In the northern communities, parents or relatives either accompanied their daughters or instructed them to walk to and from school in groups of three or four. Many parents no longer allow their daughters to attend evening activities or social events. Fier parents prevented the school from responding to their daughters' requests for an aerobics group, because they were afraid of exposing their daughters to danger by allowing them to stay after school. Students interviewed in Bushat said that girls were harassed inside the school by outsiders, and remained frightened on the streets because they had heard of so many cases of kidnapping (often related to forced prostitution). Other parents, however, expressed more fear for the safety of their sons than their daughters, because they felt that boys were more exposed to weapons and criminal gangs.

"I try to limit my children because of the situation. My daughters are dressed very simply, and they don't go out in the afternoon. They never go to discos because they are corruption centers, I go with them when they want to go out, and they are free to go only in the activities organized by the school. Although I am in a good financial situation I don't give them too much money because the money is a bad influence for the kids." A Tirana parent.

The police don't do their job as they should. Whenever the police apprehended the delinquents, the corrupt courts released them. The presence of these released felons increased the feeling of insecurity in the population. Although the situation appears calmer, it is not yet stable. Just the awareness that so many people are armed creates fear and panic. Parents fear that their children, especially their boys, might become involved with armed groups and criminality, or get killed in the crossfire between the two rival gangs in Korca. Summary from interviews of parents in Korca.

"Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, "Kinship, family and regional differentiation in Albania"
The impact of insecurity on teaching staff

Not only are schools no longer safe havens for children, teachers are also at risk. At several schools, teachers and the school directors admitted to passing failing students after receiving threats of physical violence from the students’ families. Particularly during 1997, according to informants, when violence was a mass phenomenon, teachers were threatened. In such cases, the presence of school guards or police patrols was insufficient, since most of the threats were made outside the school, and the only role the guards had was to intervene if teachers are threatened on the school premises.

According to the principal in Fier, requests for favors such as giving passing grades were not new, it also existed before 1991, but then they came more in the form of requests accompanied by gifts of deficit goods. Today, when demands for special treatment are not accompanied with threats of violence, they may arrive in the form of blackmail. For example, a powerful local figure with influence may request that a teachers change his/her child’s grade, with the implicit or explicit threat that the employment prospects of the teacher’s child could be blocked. Teachers had no recourse in such cases; they were afraid to complain to police or the judicial authorities because they considered both the police and the judicial system hopelessly corrupt. Others felt that the police have more important problems to deal with than threats to teachers. Teachers provided examples of how police had seized and then inexplicably released offending youth.

A teacher recounted that he had been threatened by a student he dismissed from class for interrupting the lesson with profanity. After the student, together with his friends, physically threatened the teacher, the teacher was forced to ask the student’s pardon. Since then, he has not dismissed any student from his class. An example from Pogradec.

“Look at where the Albanian teachers have ended up – they cannot demand anything from the kids. The kids swear and abuse them, and a kid can come to class with a pistol in his pocket.” A university student in Tirana

How schools deal with security issues

Schools have tried to externalize such problems by expelling offending students and building walls against threatening outsiders. A Tirana principal, for example, claimed that by expelling a student involved in drug distribution, the school had effectively cut its links with organized crime and drug abuse. Likewise, the school in which girls had become involved in prostitution expelled them and the boys who were also involved in the ring. Yet students and parents felt that schools had been largely ineffectual in helping them deal with the ever-present risks youth face. Students felt that schools should educate them more actively about the dangers of drugs. Likewise, Tirana parents felt expulsion of students involved with drugs was inappropriate, because it turned drugs into attractive “forbidden fruit.” They noted that some of the heavy drug users were from wealthy families, who didn’t know how to deal with the problem. These parents urged a more preventive approach. Students reported a seminar on prostitution which their sociology teacher had arranged with a social work team to raise their awareness of the issue. In Koreč, a sociology teacher took the lead and organized activities dealing with the drug problem. Students felt these activities were a step in the right direction, but criticized them for dealing with issues in the abstract rather than tackling the concrete problems that plagued their school.

14
BEFORE AND AFTER 1991: CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION

THE DESTRUCTION OF SCHOOLS

The massive destruction of public buildings, including schools, that followed the demise of the socialist regime in 1991 and the collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997 exemplifies the tendency Albanians have to view their social world in dualistic terms. Many informants explained why people destroyed schools and other public buildings by pointing out that schools were then considered part of the hated “old system.” Prior to the socialist period, the only public space in villages was located in peoples’ homes, in the form of a room for receiving male guests. It was only under Hoxha that “public” buildings, such as schools and community buildings, or “houses of culture,” were built. Schools also served as a venue for Communist Party organizing meetings and polling stations. Given the association of the school buildings with Hoxha’s hated regime, many informants interpreted the destruction, vandalism and looting of schools in 1991 and again in 1997 as a manifestation of the populations’ accumulated hatred for the dictatorship.

The unrest of 1991 and 1997 left many schools little more damaged shells without any of the basic equipment or appurtenances considered necessary for a “good education.” For such schools, the 1991 destruction was just the first of many episodes of vandalism and theft that left them with virtually empty buildings and broken furniture. In 1991 Shkodra high school was set on fire and looted, and in 1997, doors and windows were broken, desks, benches, and laboratory equipment were stolen, and looters then smashed everything they couldn’t take, such as sinks and cupboards. According to the vice principal, “We haven’t had any more theft since 1997 because there is nothing left to take.” In Fier, the school guard was tied up, a computer stolen, windows smashed, and the volleyball and basketball posts taken down. A school near Pogradec has been robbed six since March 97. The school walls were destroyed, and this allowed outsiders, and even villagers, to repeatedly enter the school.

The extent of damage, even in 1991, was not uniform, however. For an elite school such as Petro Nini, located in a settled neighborhood of Tirana known as a district of intellectuals, there was little damage even in 1991, because so many people in the environs had a relationship to the school, and parents and teachers organized to protect the school. The principal of the Arben Broci school, also in Tirana, felt that in the case of his school, the strikes and demonstrations of 1991 had an impact but did not fundamentally alter the attitude of parents and students toward the school as an institution that was important for their children’s progress.
Regarding the damage wreaked after the collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997, informants reported additional local and school-based differences. In some southern districts, the popular reaction to the collapse was more violent largely because the population had more money to invest. This was the case, for example, in Gjirokastra, where much of the population had remittances from working in Greece. According to teachers there, because schools have remained very politicized, with personnel policy decided according to political affiliation, people viewed the schools as an extension of the state and therefore attacked the schools as a form of "revenge" against the state for its failure to prevent them from being massively defrauded.

**How education has changed since 1991: stakeholder perspectives**

Most respondents sharply contrasted education before and after 1991. In their view, before 1991, security, stability and order characterized the educational system. Material conditions were good, teachers received living wages (600-800 lek a month, compared to 300 lek for workers), and felt respected and socially valued. Principals and teachers reminisced about their well-equipped science labs and good teaching materials. According to the Fier principal, sometimes enterprises "sponsored" schools. Schools sponsored by the oil enterprises, for example, received enough money to build "splendid labs."

Teachers were under strict oversight, according to the principal in Korca, and did not dare waste a minute. Teachers, in turn, recalled that they were more motivated, not only because material conditions were better, but also because students were more engaged. Parents recalled that before 1991, the schools emphasized civic education, defined as respect for the elderly and a more careful attitude toward keeping the environment clean. Informants at several schools complained that no one showed interest in cleaning up garbage-filled, foul smelling schoolyards. They also recalled that before 1991, schools had organized many cultural and sports events in which students enjoyed participating. For the parents, these activities meant that their children had spent free time productively rather than being tempted, as now, by the new pool halls and bingo games.

After 1991, schools lost prestige, according to informants, because people observed that a good education was no longer prerequisite to a good income, and that university educated people were earning less than small businessmen. The principal of Arben Broci felt that "capitalism" had changed peoples' mentality, and that students saw that "school doesn't matter anymore because people can make money without education....[while] before 1991, school was necessary for getting a job and earning a living."

Teachers and principals (but not students) used references to clothing to signify the new disorder and unruliness in the schools. As principals and teachers recalled, before 1991, students were respectful and hardworking. They wore uniforms instead of miniskirts and other "provocative" clothing. Today, teachers and principals find themselves fighting to discourage "hippie clothing" which they experience as threatening and undermining.

Not only did school staff feel threatened by students' indifference and disorderly behavior, they no longer feel supported by parents, who used to inculcate respect for authority and good behavior in their children. On the contrary, recounted one principal, when his school complained to a father...
about his son's poor performance, the parent, who owns a shop, responded that his son doesn't need school, since he would inherit the shop. Teaching staff felt that some parents sent their children to school only to make sure they didn't become involved in criminal or gang activity. According to a Fier teacher, "school attendance hasn't deteriorated, but schools have been transformed into daycare. Most parents bring their children to school to keep them away from the gangs."

**EDUCATION SINCE 1997**

Although 1991 was the most serious turning point for schools, for some informants, the events of 1997 further undermined peoples' confidence in the stability of their country. According to a teacher at Arben Broci, "in 1994-95, the value of school was increasing, something was changing—but 1997 destroyed everything."

"In the years 1995-97, compared to 1991, the situation stabilized. Things started going better, and it became safer in the schools, but it all changed in 1997. We had to live through another trauma that destroyed this stability in a drastic and frightening manner...Now things are different and it is very difficult to work under this pressure." A Tirana principal.

The evaluation was not uniformly dismal, however. Some informants felt that at least students from educated families were becoming aware that not only in Albania, but even abroad, a good education was important for finding well-paid employment. This was affirmed by the principal in Pogradec, who asserted that "the general opinion is that intellectuals will be better treated by the state in the future and that educated people will have more opportunities to find good jobs." Shkodra teaching staff shared this positive assessment of change. They attribute this to the increased labor market demands for people with higher education and to the fact that a few people have come to monopolize small business in each city, thereby closing this route for advancement. They felt that many young people had realized that migration is not a quick way of becoming rich, that many available professions demand knowledge of foreign languages, and that people with a higher education were, after all, able to earn more money than those without. "Nowadays even waiters in cities and towns need to speak a foreign language," explained a Tirana parent.

**THE DENIGRATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

A 1995 study carried out in rural Albania commented on the "desperate wish to erase anything that reminds people of the past 50 years. Old values, norms and institutions are often rejected without anything new to replace them. When people do look for new meanings and values, most seem to prefer to look forward and outward, instead of looking back or inward, disregarding their own historical experience in the construction of a new identity as individuals and a people." Our informant's tendency to sharply contrast European with Albanian educational systems, and to assume that the world must necessarily look down on all things Albanian, came through in numerous anxieties about the worth of an Albanian education and diploma.

Informants often compared Albanian education unfavorably with the education offered abroad.

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Some were convinced that Albanian diplomas, in contrast to those from other countries, were not valued abroad and felt Albanian high schools had lost their value as places to prepare students for life. Some Tirana parents estimated that youth who studied abroad had three times as many chances to find work in Albania, because of the high value placed on foreign education. Many worried that the knowledge provided by an Albanian school would not be sufficient for their children to confidently enter a foreign university.

Ambitious parents tried to hire tutors, if possible enroll their children in private schools, or even send them to high school or university abroad. A Tirana principal sadly quoted a businessman parent who planned to give his son $20,000 to study abroad because it was not worth studying in Albania. By the same token, teachers in Fier felt it unfair that students who returned to Albania after studying abroad had an easier time finding jobs with their “foreign diplomas.” Students in turn disparaged their locally trained teachers. Those enrolled in the Turkish school claimed that the Turkish teachers were more skilled because they had graduated from Turkish universities.

Students’ low estimation of Albanian education was confirmed by interviews carried out with university students in Tirana. Perhaps in response to the evident deterioration of the education system, combined with the sudden exposure to Western practices, they were fully convinced that Albanian university diplomas were not only inferior, but were not trusted or even “recognized” abroad. Thus, a few students praised a particular professor whose excellence they attributed to his “Austrian” degree, although in reality this instructor had never been abroad.

Private schools are considered superior

In contrast to the widespread and deep demoralization concerning public schools, almost all respondents believed that the new private schools that have emerged in most cities offer a superior education. First, they concurred that the schools were well-equipped with good computer facilities, audio-visual equipment, foreign language labs, and libraries, therefore better preparing students both for higher education and market requirements. Private schools were said to provide an environment that is safe and more conducive to learning and to a positive attitude on the part of staff and students. The buildings are in good condition and they have amenities lacking in many state schools, such as heating systems, and modern toilets with running water. This was notably the case for both the Greek school in Korca, and the Turkish school in Tirana, each of which receives outside funding in addition to tuition fees.

Second, informants felt that because private schools offer good salaries, they are able to attract the better teachers from the public school system and motivate them to work hard. Moreover, as a teacher from Kamza observed, private hired teachers on the basis of merit, rather than political connections. One such school, the Turkish-run school in Tirana, makes a point, according to its principal, of hiring young teachers who are relatively new to the profession, because they “don’t hold onto the stereotyped traditional teaching methods, as is the case for older teachers.” The principal of Arben Broci added that private schools could afford to have a “normal” number of students in a classroom, and were free to introduce the latest in teaching methods and good management practices.

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31 A total of 50 interviews were carried out by Erind Pajo toward his dissertation research in January 1999, and kindly summarized for this report.
Private schools are seen as more responsive to beneficiaries

Respondents also felt private schools were, by definition, more responsive to the needs and desires of students and the parents who paid their fees. Parents, for their part, were more involved and demanding because they paid high fees for their children’s education. Private schools were quicker to respond to “market demands,” both in terms of offering teaching in market-relevant courses such as computer science, and in responding to the expressed desires of the students. Likewise, students were more motivated to work, and also held to very high requirements. In the Turkish school, for example, students were kept to a strict and demanding schedule, but they were also provided opportunities for a range of extracurricular activities. Parents, teachers, and principals of public schools thought that private schools did a better job in equipping students for higher education and employment.

Many respondents believed that graduates of private schools had better chances of being admitted to universities, not only in Albania, but also abroad. Interviewed parents of Tirana public school students asserted that 90 percent of private school students won admission by virtue of their superior exam results. Only in Gjirokastra were respondents unenthusiastic about private schools. Despite the relative wealth of the city, thus far it only supports two private schools. The schools are run by two religious communities; one is Muslim, the other Christian Orthodox. According to all respondents, the schools differed little from the public schools, with the exception of additional classes in religion.

Private education as a threat to public schools and a risk to equity

Despite the general conviction that most private schools offered a superior education, however, respondents expressed concerns about the equity aspect of private schooling. Although teachers admitted they would far prefer to work and send their own children to private schools, they also felt that private education still constitutes “education for the children of the rich.” For example, the Turkish school charges $150 a month, while the even more expensive Abraham Lincoln school charges $350 a month. While private schools have sprung up in cities, in smaller towns such as Bushat, respondents were not aware of private schools there, and felt that the community was too impoverished to support them. Most people interviewed there felt that considering local students could not even afford to pay for extra foreign language classes, private education would be out of the question.

Overall, respondents were ambivalent about the broader social impact of private schooling. They felt that because they threatened to draw away good teachers and students from the public school system, they would serve as a useful stimulus to the public school system to improve its performance (although they were not clear on the precise nature of the incentives). The principal of the Petro Nini, for example, felt that private schools were a useful model from more developed countries, served as a useful challenge to public schools, and that both systems would benefit by closer cooperation. Parents felt that although many of them could not afford to send their children to private schools, that public schools would improve if the government encouraged public schools to compete with each other just as the private schools do. Parents of pupils in the girls’ section of the Turkish school felt that the Ministry of Education should adopt a “carrot and the stick” policy, by disciplining teachers who neglected their tasks, but also rewarding teachers and school management at the end of the year for a job well done.

Other respondents, by contrast, felt strongly that it would be better to improve public education in Albania before encouraging the development of private schooling. Otherwise the private schools would only hasten the deterioration of the public school system by siphoning off the best teachers and students. Some parents felt that since only the children of the nouveaux riches, described as
largely uneducated, could afford to send their children to private schools, that private schools could not succeed, because their programs were too demanding for the unmotivated children of the new rich. They suggested that private schools would only work when educated families could afford to send their children there.
THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

This chapter focuses on the heart of the learning experience – what goes on in the classroom. Given the very poor material conditions for teaching staff and students, and the dearth of incentives for teaching staff, it is a testament to the dedication of educators as well as students that the education process has nevertheless continued in the last, difficult years.

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Uncomfortable, deteriorating facilities

Since 1991, the damage wreaked on many public schools has been compounded by lack of maintenance and interruptions in electricity and water supply. Schools now function with damaged doors, broken windows, leaking roofs, and non-functioning toilets. In Bushat, informants reported that the insulation was so poor that when it rained, classes could not be held on the second floor of the school because of the dampness. In such schools, winter usage of electricity is restricted to only a few hours a day. On dark stays, the blackboard was barely visible. Students complained that the dark empty classrooms were uncomfortable and boring. The lack of toilets and running water was uncomfortable, especially for girls. In some schools, when students needed to use a toilet, they were forced to go to the homes of friends living near the school. Such deficiencies are found not only in neglected rural schools, but even in large urban schools in Tirana.

Overcrowded classrooms

The significant rural-urban migration has put a severe strain on urban schools, where classes must often accommodate between 40 to 50 students. In Fier, teachers were upset that it had been necessary to convert laboratories to classrooms. Even high schools in large villages or small towns attended by students from middle schools in surrounding villages are overcrowded. Students crowded three or four to bench intended for two students, which was not only uncomfortable but made taking notes difficult. Overcrowded classrooms also prevented teachers from involving all the students in the usual 45 minutes sessions, or keeping the classes organized. A teacher in Fier explained, “A large number of students means that new lessons cannot be fully explained, quizzes are not finished and noise rules the classroom.” Both rural and urban teachers found that overcrowding led to conflicts and made it harder for them to deal with disruptive students.

DECLINING INCENTIVES FOR TEACHERS

Inadequate salaries

Most informants linked the drastic decline in the quality of education to the loss of qualified and experienced teachers and demotivation of who remained. They considered low salaries more
important than poor working conditions, lack of teaching materials, or lack of safety. Teachers currently earn between 8000 to 14000 lek, depending on level of experience and where they teach. According to teachers and other key informants, this amount only covered 30 to 40% of their monthly living expenses. To remedy their situation, many teachers have migrated abroad for work, entered more lucrative businesses or taken on second jobs, which reduced time and energy available for teaching. The loss of qualified teachers, in turn, had forced the Ministry of Education to hire unqualified teachers, some of whom had only a high school diploma or a few years of university.

The growing importance of second jobs

Some qualified supplemented their income by providing private lessons. Teachers of math, chemistry, biology, physics, and foreign languages have the greatest opportunity to tutor privately, mainly to students in their last two or three years of high school who are preparing for university. Teachers generally charge between 300 to 500 lek an hour, and provide two one-hour lessons a week. In some cases, this practice has led to abuse. Some students and parents accused teachers of exploiting their position by pressuring students in their own classes to enroll for private lessons. A number of informants also claimed that teachers accepted gifts or bribes in exchange for good treatment and better grades (while grades are no longer considered for admission to university, they are still important if students hope to earn scholarships for studying abroad). Although such cases undoubtedly exist, it is also the case that pervasive suspicion of dishonesty in where none can also provide students and their parents an excuse for poor classroom performance.

"Teachers neglect their work and lack motivation because their salaries are low. Given their small salaries, they are forced to take on second jobs, from raising animals to selling on the street, which lowers their status in the community. Older teachers feel tired and disillusioned by a profession that doesn't allow them to save enough to lead a decent life after they retire." A principal from the northeast.

TEACHING METHODS

Constraints on teachers

Although the autonomy and innovativeness of teachers is sharply constrained by the program set by the Ministry, teachers have more freedom than in the past to experiment with new teaching methods. Yet most teachers, especially older ones, continue to rely on lecturing, and expect students to sit quietly and listen. There is little systematic practice of eliciting or incorporating students' opinions or preferences into the teaching process. Memorization and recollection of facts, rather than interpretation or evaluation, constitutes "learning" for such teachers. Based on this definition of learning, teachers organize classes by checking on students knowledge of information presented in previous classes, then proceed to present them with new information in the form of a lecture.

Some teachers expressed interest in new teaching methods, involving students more actively in discussion, and using materials and books other than the assigned textbooks. Teachers did not, however, feel supported by the Ministry of Education. A number of teachers felt the Ministry made decisions about the curriculum without taking into consideration the needs and limitations of the teachers, including the scarcity of teaching materials. One teacher noted that because high school literature
textbooks were not yet available, during lessons students had to take notes on a book rather than preparing by actually reading it. Another teacher complained, "Translated materials on Dostoevsky and other such works are hard enough for the teachers to find, let alone the students." In some cases, teachers themselves purchased teaching materials such as maps for their classrooms.

**Student perceptions of classroom relations**

While students recognized the efforts of some teachers to provide interesting classes against odds, others felt intimidated. Many found their teachers and principals oppressive, authoritarian, harsh, and arrogant, unwilling or unable to communicate with them. As one student put it, "The mighty power of teachers cannot be questioned or challenged." Students affirmed that when problems arose, they always preferred to talk to their parents or friends rather than to teachers, because they felt that a large gap separated them, and that most of the teachers were inexperienced in establishing friendly relations with students. The age of teachers did not necessarily determine how students evaluated them, in some cases, students found that younger, less experienced teachers treated them more harshly than did older, more confident ones.

Rural students felt that there was still a strong mentality in villages that the teacher "was always right," and therefore students, especially younger ones, were terrified of exposing themselves to retaliation. Students in a village school recounted an altercation with a first year high school boy, as a result of which the teacher struck the boy and then expelled him.

Students recounted several confrontations when they had acted collectively against what they considered abusive or unfair conduct. An urban student described an incident from her first year of high school, when her class was doing poorly academically. They were put into a bad-smelling room as punishment. One day, the principal entered the classroom, commented on the bad smell, and then added, "It serves you right." The entire class stayed away from school for a week, until the principal ordered that the schoolyard outside the classroom be cleaned up to get rid of the smell. In another class, confronted with a surprise quiz, students refused to write, since according to the school rules, they were supposed to be informed before the teacher administered a test or quiz. The students resisted because they assumed that the teacher was hoping to favor some of the students she knew, at the expense of the others.

**TEACHER TRAINING**

In-service teacher training is reportedly in a state of confusion. In 1998, the Ministry of Education initiated a new training program. This program shifting training to district level Education Directorates, using school inspectors as in-service trainers. According to a Soros report, although responsibility for training shifted, the structure and plans for implementing the training are still lacking in many regions. Moreover, the training program lacked a systematic approach to issues of quality, the content of training and specific training needs, and monitoring and evaluation. Inspectors lacked the training and experience necessary to adequately carry out their new responsibilities.21

Currently the main sources of training are NGOs and foreign foundations, among which the Soros Foundation is the main source of in-service training. Soros has encouraged teachers to engage their students in the lessons and hold debates in their classes. Some teachers and principals, however,

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21 Source, An Educational Development Strategy for Albania (AEDP)
felt that the training offered was not always unsystematic or based on teachers’ actual needs. The training focuses mainly on social science teachers; informants did not appear to think that new methods were relevant to the natural sciences. Soros has organized brief training sessions on teaching methods, school democracy, fighting crime, and conflict resolution. Some of their trainees, mainly in large cities, have introduced group work into their classes, which teachers and students agreed had made them more interesting. Students praised several sociology teachers for innovative teaching.

Teachers expressed the desire to be trained in new methods, and felt the state should provide it. Yet aside from the efforts of Soros, the vast majority of teachers in village or small town schools had not received any training in the past few years. Even teachers working in schools receiving assistance from Soros were not always able to take training, either because they couldn’t afford to travel and stay in Tirana, or they were unable to leave their families or small children for the periods of time for which Soros had organized the courses.

THE PROBLEM OF TEXTBOOKS

Textbook quality

The quality of textbooks constitutes another issue in the classroom. Teachers criticized textbooks, particularly in advanced math, history, chemistry and philosophy, as theoretically overburdened, and sometimes written in ways which both they and students found incomprehensible. They expressed concern about the amount of information in the textbooks and found the way it was presented to be overwhelming for students, particularly those just moving up from middle schools. Students found the textbooks difficult to understand because of the difficult language, and claimed that in some cases, even their teacher was unable to explain the material. They claimed that lessons were not logically linked together, and concepts were not clearly defined. Teachers agreed that textbooks should be written more simply, and use easier and clearer concepts. Some teachers prepared shorter simplified versions of the textbooks, which they dictated to students. Informants also criticized textbook quality. The books are printed on poor quality or dark paper, resulting in blurred or barely visible illustrations and figures. Poor bindings caused the textbooks to fall apart easily. In some cases, whole sections were omitted when the books were bound.

Textbook production

Given the discomfort teachers expressed about the politicization of textbook production, it is instructive to look at this process. Officially, the Ministry of Education directs the Institute for Pedagogical Studies, a branch of the Ministry, to prepare a new textbook. The Institute then instructs a board, whose members it has appointed, which determines the program to be covered in a given subject and then finds a team of authors to write the text. Alternatively, specialists (some of whom may then be asked to write the new textbook) sometimes initiate the call for substantial revisions or entirely new texts. The process is ad hoc and ill-defined, and allows room for considerable pursuit of private interests, including textbook-writing contracts.

This process is further complicated by the agendas of the two major political parties. The Institute of History, responsible for the writing of history textbooks, is now rewriting textbooks that
were published in 1994, when the Democratic Party and its appointees were in power. According to a staff member of the Institute, when Democratic Party appointees held posts in the Institute, they "falsified" history by glorifying opponents of the Communist Party, even characterizing Albanians who collaborated with Germany or Italy during World War II as "liberators," while those who fought as partisans with the Allies were portrayed as "collaborators" with the Russians — and therefore as Communists. In this fashion, cast a negative light on all the achievements of the socialist period. New textbooks are now being written to "correct" these falsifications by describing the positive achievements of the socialist period in health, education, and employment.

In a content analysis of textbooks currently in use in Albanian schools, Erind Pajo noted that since the authors of textbooks now in use are themselves products of the educational and ideological formation of the socialist period, they cannot help but reproduce many socialist-era philosophical assumptions about the world. He found that (i) most of the textbooks failed to address the issues of greatest relevance to young Albanians (such as poverty, unemployment and crime); (ii) they presented explanations or interpretations as "fact." In many cases, the content remained very dated and politicized. One reason may simply be that in the whirl of social transformation, Albanians have yet to develop a shared understanding of the past.22

CURRICULUM: ITS RESPONSE TO CHANGING DEMANDS

Overloaded curricula

Informants had numerous complaints about curriculum, ranging from inability to make individual choices, to its unsuitability for the emerging market economy. Informants largely felt that teachers and students were too constrained by the curriculum in high school, and this constraint made teaching and learning superficial. They felt high schools should allow students to choose their own concentrations based on personal interest and career choice. "If a student wants to study psychology in the university, why should he or she spend time studying chemistry and physics?" a parent asked rhetorically. Most interviewed students were enthusiastic about the idea of choosing their own specialty. Some senior students felt that only half the 15 classes should be mandatory, and that students should be able to choose the remaining classes.

Discontinuity between middle and high school

Teachers and students were concerned about the jarring discontinuity between middle and high school, and felt middle schools poorly prepared students for high school. Consequently, first-year high school students, particularly those from poor rural middle schools, found themselves overwhelmed by the conceptual complexity of the subjects and academic expectations when they entered high school. Mathematics was reportedly one of the subjects that presented the most problems of discontinuity. A Tirana high school mathematics teacher pointed out that high school textbooks were not coordinated with middle school textbooks, and assumed knowledge of concepts that had not been taught in middle school. A teacher who had taught chemistry for 5 years in middle school before moving 7 years ago to his present position as chemistry high school teacher made a similar point about unrealistic assumptions about what middle school students were expected to know when they entered

high school chemistry classes. This lack of coordination forces teachers to spend extra time preparing and providing remedial instruction in these subjects.

**Preparing school leavers for higher education or employment**

Parents and some teachers felt high schools did not adequately prepare students for university exams. Parents in particular felt that the need to take private lessons as preparation reflected this inadequacy and the lack of connection between secondary and higher education.

Many informants had very pragmatic expectations of school. They did not particularly embrace the new educational ideology propounded by Soros and other education reformers that schools should train young people to think critically, and provide the kind of knowledge that could be applied in a range of situations. Rather, they expected school to provide specific training for specific jobs. Some reminisced nostalgically about the past, when students moved smoothly from school to university to job. There was general consensus among informants, particularly those in depressed rural areas, that schools should offer much more in the way of practical courses to prepare young people for employment work as waiters, salespersons, or computer operators.

Students, in particular, were anxious for such courses. They felt they received far too little training in subjects that would help them find work. They noted that even when qualified teachers taught more practical courses, they lacked the experience to provide real hands-on training. Even more critically, most schools, especially rural ones, lacked computers. Or if they had computers, they were old and often used as little more than typewriters.

Although many schools had little idea of what became of their students after graduation, some teachers wanted to introduce counseling in high schools to help students prepare for life after school. The teachers envisioned providing both career counseling or help preparing for university entrance exams, depending on the students' needs.

**The ideological content of curricula**

In addition to the practical issues of subjects and methods, many educators voiced concern about how to fill the ideological gap and convey a sense of national pride to disaffected and disillusioned students. A teacher at the Turkish High School reported that three years ago, when asked which nationalities they would choose if they could have dual citizenship, 60 percent of polled students listed Albanian nationality and one other. In 1999, only 40 percent of the polled students mentioned Albanian nationality. The Fier principal also observed that the majority of students wanted to settle abroad. Discouraged by the problems now besetting young people in Albania—impoverishment and instability; drugs and crime, pressures to leave home and country to find work — educators and parents expressed the desire to help young people view their own country more positively.

The Pogradec principal collects traditional proverbs. He described the Albanians an ancient people with many traditions, and felt if students learned more about their nation, they would develop greater love for it. Although youth are now leaving Albania, he hoped that by increasing their patriotism, he could help inspire the younger generation to devote their energy to build up their own country, rather other countries.
Most of our informants defined patriotism in a rather apolitical way as the love of Albanian folk and moral traditions, arts, and music; others included an appeal to the great nineteenth century nationalist writers. Principals found it unacceptable that students did not even know the national anthem, much less sing it at school occasions, although one principal noted that the Ministry of Education had advised schools to introduce daily singing of the anthem to bolster patriotic feelings in students. Teachers in Fier were sad that students no longer visited their national museums, felt an emotional attachment to holidays such as Liberation Day of the City, Independence Day or others, or knew about the patriotic writers such Naim Frasheri, the great nationalist poet.

Some informants felt that de-politicization and deideologization of education had gone too far. Thus, the principal of Arben Broci in Tirana complained that pride in being Albanian had been replaced by the disparagement of everything Albanian. “There are no Albanian realities in our textbooks. We are even afraid to say the name of Enver Hoxha. But that was the reality of Albania in those times. We should study it just as the world studies Hitler or Stalin.” The parent of a teacher at his school expressed a similar feeling, that “the new generation does not like Albanian things, and is not proud of our origin. In this respect, the school plays an important role. In classes such as Civic Education, history, or geography, they can use Albanian examples. They should find a space to talk about the positive values of Albanians.” The analysis of Albanian textbooks also notes the absence of strong nationalistic sentiment. The texts contain an awareness of Albanian identity, but this self-awareness is permeated with a sense of inferiority connected with being poor, in contrast to the wealthy and admired countries of Europe or North America, and being Islamic and thereby “non-Western.”

The Southeast European Joint History Project: Albania is included in the Joint History Project (JHP), sponsored by the Center for Democracy in Southeast Europe, one objective of which is to challenge the ethnic and national myths and stereotypes with potential to exacerbate regional tensions. Among its other activities, it is setting up a multi-national Textbook Committee to examine and propose revision to textbooks and teaching methods in order to “introduce subtle, gradual, but profound change on the level of difference-producing elites, such as academics and educators.” (See Annex II for a description of CDSEE and the JHP).

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INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: THE "SCHOOL COLLECTIVE"

THE SCHOOL AND THE "COMMUNITY"

Concepts of community

Massive and repeated destruction of schools makes questions about the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities particularly pertinent in Albania. Even discussing the relationship between the school and the "community," however, proved difficult, since there was little consensus among informants on the meaning of this concept. For this study, it was difficult to translate the term even to pose questions about the existence of a "school community." The problem was often resolved by using Albanian terms for "neighborhood." Alternatively, the term "kolektivi i shkolles" (school collective) was used, although this term includes only those people directly involved in the school — the principal and vice-principals, teachers and support staff, and students; even students' families were excluded in this definition. When asked about their "school community," then, respondents usually responded in geographical rather than social terms by referring to the district where the school was located. In a small town with a single high school, the "community" became the entire town. In bigger cities, the community was identical with the administrative division. In Korca, for example, respondents defined the district in which the school was located as the "school community."

The dramatic migrations which have changed the character of neighborhoods, districts, and cities in Albania since 1991 have also affected the relationships between schools and surrounding neighborhoods. The Petro Nini school, for example, was built 20 years ago in a stable part of the city where it has educated many generations. According to the principal, the school was a local landmark for people who described their homes as being located "in the Petro Nini area." Although it has become part of the landscape, the principal admitted that since 1991, the school had not involved the community (e.g., people living in the neighborhood) in any activities, with the exception of some cultural events to which the parents were invited.

The tendency to interpret the "school community" as either a self-contained entity — the school collective — or as a geographic concept, derives in part from the fact that the school is still seen as part of the state apparatus, and therefore as explicitly "outside," "alien," and the legitimate target of violence. The replacement of principals each time a new minister is appointed further reinforces perceptions of the school as closer to the state apparatus rather than to the community, be this defined as the school collective or the neighborhood. As one principal stated, he considers himself an employee of the state, in charge of implementing all the rules made by the state. Commenting on damage to the school, a principal noted that "the community was not inclined to help the school because they consider it part of the government structure."

Another for the difficulty of mobilizing people to work together on school-related projects of

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24 Schwandner-Sievers, personal communication.
common interest, such as cleaning the area around their apartments or making playgrounds for their children, stems from memories of enforced “voluntary work” of the socialist period. Then, the larger schools had Communist Party committees that ensured that schools remained on the correct ideological track. They maintained close relations with similar committees at parent’s workplaces and in their neighborhood, and were frequently chastised parents publicly for their children’s poor behavior or lack of school behavior. Similarly, as the Korca principal explained, youth organizations that served “as gears of the Communist Party mechanism” kept young people under scrutiny and squelched initiative.

A few teaching staff and students felt that such organizations had also played a positive role, and regretted that no substitute had emerged. Informants from Kamza high school recalled very positively the joint school-community projects to clean the area right around the school and felt that a kind of community “solidarity” had been lost. A member of the interview team noted that one of the biggest problems facing Albanians is the difficulty in reconciling personal and societal interests in the sudden atmosphere of extreme individualism, in which people maintain their own apartments, but throw their garbage everywhere.

Among the studied schools, only staff in one Tirana school referred explicitly to the school’s outreach to the community. The teacher felt that the school should take the first steps to improve relations with the community. The school was beginning to do this by holding monthly meetings with parents, who in turn were welcomed to invite other people in the area to attend discussions on topics such as human rights, children’s rights, the problems of adolescents, and so forth. The principal and a teacher mentioned that the school was using money collected from parents to build a room which would be used for such “community” events.

"After 1991, the relationship between the school and community weakened. The destruction of the political system and the local organizations that dealt with the school (among other things) created a gap, and no mechanism for bridging this gap has emerged. Parents’ attempts to create links with the school are still weak. The factors that prevent parents from getting more involved include indifference and being tired of the old system of “volunteering,” lack of time, and so on.” The principal of the Petro Nini school.

Schools and NGOs

Some foreign organizations and NGOs, including the Soros Foundation, are trying to narrow the gap between communities and schools. For example, Soros and other foundations are supporting their community-building efforts by investing in the basic physical infrastructure and equipment. A couple of months prior to the interviews, Soros had helped one of the schools in the study to build a library and an entertainment hall. In school construction projects, Soros leaves schools incomplete to ensure that communities become involved in completing them. Sometimes Soros provides matching funds, which prompted a Tirana school to organize a fundraising campaign. It collected 200 to 500 lek from each students and received matching fund by Soros for renovations.

In addition, schools receive help from other NGOs, churches, mosques, embassies, foreign schools and government. The assistance may be in the form of cash for repair or rebuilding of schools,
Principals, teachers, and in some cases, well-connected parents at many schools are trying to twin their schools with schools in Italy, Greece, France and elsewhere in Europe as a way to improve the quality of teaching and acquire material help. In Korca, the school had twinned with schools in Termoli, Greece, and Paris, France. Teachers in Pogradec hoped that they would be able to twin with a French school through the Acquitaine Albanie. This NGO was actively trying to involve the local community, according to a teacher who belongs to it, by organizing meetings at which particular books are discussed. The NGO also provided material assistance to some families. Teachers were looking forward to the arrival of "French experts" who were to hold lectures on criminality, drugs, unemployment, and other social issues.

AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THE SCHOOL

The role of the Ministry

Principals, teachers, and parents all expressed discontent at the top-down organization of education, particularly Ministerial control over curriculum, staffing, and textbooks. The only area in which decisions are now made at a school level, according to teaching staff, is that of teaching methods. A principal argued that by designing and enforcing a curriculum with subjects such as astronomy, the Ministry was neglecting the more practical and vocationally-oriented that students preferred, and that would better help them meet the demands of a market economy. Teachers criticized the Ministry approach because they felt that a set curriculum denied students the opportunity to follow their own preferences or to set their own priorities. According to one teacher, this rigidity suggested that the Ministry was afraid to try new approaches to education.

Teachers at several schools complained that despite their control, Ministry personnel were in fact out of touch with the reality of local schools. As a teacher in Tirana put it, “I have never met the representatives of the Directory of Education, because they never come to my school. Maybe that is because we are not important for them. I have seen the Minister of Education once, at a conference. He shook our hands when he arrived.”

Private schools suffer less from ministerial control. The Turkish school, for example, has to submit a plan detailing school activity to the Ministry for its approval. The Ministry frequently sends inspectors to the school to check on classroom activities, including preparation and testing. Nevertheless, the school is subject to significantly less control and oversight than the public schools.

The limited formal authority of principals

Formally, principals have little authority. Their main job is to manage and coordinate the day-
to-day affairs of the school, including issues of discipline and attendance. Principals lack formal control over the state-allocated budget. As the principal admitted, not only does the school lack its own budget, he himself has no idea how much money is even allocated to the school during a given school year. He doesn’t know whether education funds are distributed equally among schools or whether the allocations are decided by low-ranking education officials. When something at the school needs fixing, he said, he solicits aid from his businessmen friends.

Given meager state budgets, some principals take the initiative to find sponsors or patrons for their schools. For example, during a private visit to Germany, the principal of a Tirana school returned with four computers for her school. A Tirana principal, through a friend who was an influential education official, learned that school desks and chairs were available at a state enterprise. The municipality, responsible for supplying the school with furniture, lacked funds to fulfill this obligation, so the principal made use of her friendship to obtain the furniture directly from the state enterprise without paying. A Tirana principal who had graduated from the physics department of Tirana University has been able to make a private arrangement for her students to use the university’s physics and chemistry labs.

A very sore point for principals and parents alike is the principal’s lack of authority over the hiring and firing of teachers in their own schools. Principals complained that it is the Education Directorate that appoints teachers, while their own recommendations are ignored. Their powerlessness was particularly an issue in the case of teachers who were not doing their jobs properly. During one interview with a principal, in fact, a teacher interrupted on several occasions to complain that her class would not pay attention to her. The principal confided to the interviewer that he had requested her dismissal, because was a poor teacher unable to command the respect of her class. He suspected that his request had been ignored because this teacher had powerful friends in the Directorate of Education.

Some parents criticized principals for dealing ineffectively with teachers. Parents of students in Korca and Tirana also described problems their children had experienced with teachers. In one case, the teacher had pressured a child to take a private class under threat of harassment and poor grades. In another case, a mother alleged that her daughter had been treated badly because the father, a telephone company employee in charge of phone installation, had not helped the teacher “jump the queue,” and the teacher, in retaliation, had “psychologically tormented” her daughter. In yet a third case, a parent complained to the principal that the math teacher had pressured his child to pay for private tutoring. In none of these cases were the principals, according to parents, able to intervene. For their part, principals complained that even in the most unambiguous cases, when teachers had excessively violated school rules regarding absenteeism or lateness, their hands were tied.

"Ten of the teachers in this school are poor, but I cannot fire them because it is not my competence to decide who is going to be on the school staff. The Directorate of Education does that. The head of the Directorate of Education hires teachers who come from his region, even though they are not competent. We decided to fire a teacher who worked very poorly, and that is why we are now in conflict with the head of the Directorate." A principal.

To the extent that principals have significant influence over events in their school, this authority,
according to parents, is usually based on political connections and support. Teachers in Fier noted that on occasion, principals would harass teachers affiliated with the opposing political party. This harassment involved undermining and criticizing the teachers’ work. While the interviewed teachers asserted that this was not a problem at their school, they said it was a common phenomenon in village schools, where teachers were usually intimidated by the principal as a result of political affiliation. Soros staff, interviewed for this study, are urging professional certification for principals in order to reduce the likelihood of politically-based appointments.

**THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

Aside from individual strategies, teachers for the most part lack meaningful forum for regular discussion. None of the interviewed teachers mentioned any sort of professional organization. The only national-level organizations related to education consists of two unions, the Independent Trade Union of Education of Albania and the Confederate Trade Union of Education and Science. While both unions claim to be independent of political parties, it is widely acknowledged that they have party affiliations; according to many informants, one of their main purposes is to further party-related interests. Indeed, each party is one of several professional unions that are part of larger “Independent” and “Federation” umbrella parties. The Federation is the successor to the socialist-era trade union, and now affiliated with the Socialist Party, while the Independent was formed later by the Democratic Party. Both parties, however, give 1990 as the date when they were founded.

In terms of formal size, the parties are fairly similar — the Independent claims 20,000 members, and the Federation (which, unlike the Independent, covers university professors) claims 15,000 members — although the definition of “membership” is unclear, since there are non-paying members. The unions are said to finance 60-70 percent of their activities, however, from rents from the hotels, resorts, recreation facilities, and concert halls they received from the Communist Party, which transferred 50 percent of its property to the Independent, 40 percent to the Federation, and the remaining 10 percent to three smaller parties.

According to union leaders, the main function of both unions is to represent educators and support their demands for better working conditions, higher salaries, fairer hiring and firing policies, and medical benefits. In 1998, the unions decided to collaborate with each other. They agreed with the Government on several measures (which must be voted on by the legislature), including salary increases. In 1998, they also organized sporadic strikes in support of these measures.

At present, the unions are the largest national-level organization said to be capable of mobilizing people. Yet from the response of principals and teaching staff, it appears that even those who belong to the unions do not place much confidence in them. Informants felt that since their aims were similar, it would make more sense for them to merge. All of them viewed the unions as very politicized, and more interested in defending the interest of their parties than that of their members. Although several teachers mentioned the strikes, they noted that the teachers had not been united. A principal who described himself as a member confessed that the union had never held a meeting during the entire time of his membership. Those teachers who mentioned a recent three day strike acknowledged that teachers themselves were not united in the strike. At one Tirana school, teachers said they had made up missed classes on Saturdays, so that students would not be affected. They did note, however, that
the strike resulted in a salary increase and removal of the “solidarity tax” for the police.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS

School expectation of parents

Whatever their involvement in the school, none of the interviewed parents or school staff felt that parents should involve themselves in issues of curriculum or teaching. Rather, the school perspective is that parents should take full responsibility for their child’s behavior, ensure that the child arrives at school well-dressed, well-fed, well-behaved, and prepared to absorb the lessons of the day. School staff expected parents to take an active interest in their children’s academic progress, and show willingness to help the child deal with difficulties. School staff particularly welcomed parents who had material resources or appropriate skills to help the school materially.

Formally, and as continuation of socialist era patterns, parents’ contact with teachers consisted of monthly meetings at which teachers brought up problems of school performance, absenteeism, or poor behavior. In the studied schools in Tirana, teachers noted that about 70 percent of parents, usually mothers, attended these meetings. In towns such as Rreshen or Bushat (where nearly half the students come from surrounding villages), or cities such as Gjirokastra, which also draws students from villages, the numbers of parents attending, according to teachers, fell sharply, which teachers often attributed to parental disinterest.

“From early childhood, parents should endeavor to teach their child to be well-mannered, respectful, and responsible. While the school works to prepare the student academically, the family is in charge of teaching the child values.” A parent’s view.

When possible, parents tried to establish personal relationships with teaching staff, to ensure that their children receive better treatment. Both teachers and parents acknowledged that even when parents could or did not attend regularly scheduled meetings, parents sometimes contacted the teachers outside of school for information. One parent had made efforts to enroll her child in a school district in a school where she already knew the principal and several teachers, although the child was not actually eligible to enroll there. However, because it was difficult for the parent to frequently visit the school, she want to feel that school staff would take a personal and protective interest in her daughter. She was satisfied, declaring that when her friend, the principal, encountered her daughter in the corridor, he did not yell at her as he often did at other students.

“I have good relationships with the principal; she comes to my house for coffee. If teachers are good, I give them gifts, because I appreciate what they do for my children. This isn’t bribery – bribery is giving something so that something will be done, but a gift is given afterwards, but because I want to give it, not because the teachers demand it.” A Tirana parent

Constraints to parent-teacher contact

Even in terms of bilateral relationships between teachers and families, lack of transportation
rural and peri-urban communities means that parents are unable to easily visit the school and establish relationships with their children’s teachers, or that commuting teachers are not available after school hours. In Bushat, for example, families of students from outlying villages have few opportunities to come to the school. In addition, most of the teachers commute to Bushat from Shkodra, and leave school at one o’clock, even before the end of the teaching day, to catch the bus home. Moreover, the school is in such poor condition that it cannot even host activities that could bring students and their families together with the school staff. Transportation is also an issue in cities. Teachers at a Tirana school pointed out that half the students came from peri-urban areas on the other side of the river, and that the distance prevented closer relations with the students’ parents.

In districts with rapidly changing populations, such as Kamza, which has large numbers of migrants from the rural northeast, teachers felt that parent-teacher relationships depended a great deal on whether the teacher lived nearby. When teachers were part of the same geographic community, parents felt more at ease and willing to discuss problems. Students from the private Turkish high school, which draws its students from a large geographic area outside Tirana, felt that there was little relationship between school and community, and that they themselves had little information about the neighborhood in which the school was located. Rather, the key relationships were between religious authorities, teachers, and the school directorate.

Reasons that parents fail to regularly attend school meetings included their difficult economic circumstances — they were too busy and too worried about more pressing issues. Another reason, however, concerned the content of the meetings themselves, in which teachers reported to and remonstrated with parents. As Korca teachers acknowledged, parents of students with problems only attended meetings rarely, because they were already aware of their children’s problems, and “sick and tired of hearing complaints from the school.

Parent councils and boards

In most of the studied schools, formal relationships between parents and the teaching staff (including the principal) also take place through elected councils, and boards (usually appointed). Each class has its own parent council that selects a member to participate in a school-level council. The councils have very narrowly defined roles. Only in the private Turkish school does the council, according to the principal, have greater weight than the Education Directorate in making pedagogical decisions. For councils in public schools, the most important function appeared to be fundraising (often through personal donations). Other school staff acknowledged that the parent-teacher councils were purely formal. The parent council in Kamza, likewise, had not accomplished its task of encouraging more contact between parents and teachers. The majority of interviewed parents were not only unaware of how the parent councils worked, some felt that they were uninformed about appropriate procedures for dealing with the different kinds of problems that might arise. For the most part, parents therefore met with teachers on an individual basis when they had complaints.

The function of the councils appear to overlap with parent boards, and informants often failed to distinguish between the two. Parents from many schools were barely aware of the boards, or knew they existed, but not what their function was. Many had never been informed about elections or activities.

For the most part, because schools have so many financial problems, principals and teachers forthrightly stated that they preferred to recruit highly educated and/or well-to-do parents or
"businessmen" to the parent boards, because they are more willing to help financially. In a Tirana school, the management simply selected parents on the basis of their ability to provide financial assistance. One such member was a banker who had paid for a banquet of 50 to honor students who had won regional and national competitions. In a small northern town, the two most powerful businessmen on the board contributed 15,000 lek for school repair. In Gjirokastër, the board members have donated as much as teachers' salaries, the principal said. The money was used to fix the electric system and repair classrooms.

Not all boards were activist or successful. In one case, a member had failed in their attempt to twin the school with a school abroad. A principal criticized the board of his school for failing to take initiative, call meetings, and offer help instead of waiting to be called upon.

Parents' financial support to schools

Parents' cash and in-kind contributions were an important source of assistance for schools. Even though this assistance was not always systematic and substantial, most schools relied on it. In addition to cash contribution, parents sometimes gave in-kind contributions such as heaters, window glass, light bulbs, and other items. Parents also paid some recurrent costs. For instance, in Kamza and Fier, parents concerned for the safety of their children, paid for a school guard. Most often, parents preferred to contribute for specific items or repairs of the classroom in which their own children sat. A Tirana principal gave the example of a parent who had purchased three heaters for the school, one for principal's office, one for the teachers' room and one for his son's classroom.

Of course, the extent of parental cash contributions depends on their financial means. In small towns and larger villages such as Bushat or Rreshen, many parents were able to contribute about 200 lek a month during the winter for heat. Urban families are able to contribute more. In a Tirana school, the parents had collected 35,000 lek from one class alone. The monthly contribution of parents in this school was between 200 and 1000 lek.

A NEW INITIATIVE: STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Some schools have inaugurated student governments, mainly under the guidance of the Soros Foundation. The governments, to which each class sends "senators," are supposed to serve as conduits through which students can lodge formal complaints about teachers, or make suggestions about activities or excursions to the school principal. The governments also have a mandate to organize debates and discussions about social issues concerning youth, such as substance abuse, crime, and prostitution.

According to teachers, parents, and students in schools where governments had been established, they were not particularly effective. Student senators in a northern city said that their principal had denied requests for activities and excursions due to lack of funds and security problems. Some student government members said they feared complaining about teachers because they thought teachers would somehow retaliate against them. The deputy principal in one school felt that a problem of student government in her school was that students still had difficulty asserting their needs and discussing their problems with principals. A Tirana principal was more positive, however. He said that his school's student government had arranged a number of activities, including a local clean-up and an anti-smoking campaign.
ACCESS AND EQUITY: GROWING EXCLUSION

The socialist regime accomplished much in the way of bringing education to underserved areas and populations, and raising the general educational level of the population. The partial collapse of the education system since the end of socialism has begun to reverse this trend and contributed to the development or increase of inequities. The following section examines three areas in which inequities have increased, and points to processes of exclusion now threatening to marginalize certain social groups.

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL POVERTY ON EDUCATION

Barriers experienced by poor students

Although public education remains free, students from poor families face a number of educational barriers. Even in urban areas, schools vary in quality. It is the more prosperous or well-connected parents who are able to pull strings and violate local regulations to enroll their children in the best schools. Even there, parents are under pressure to provide contributions. Poor families were convinced that children whose parents contribute gifts or cash receive better treatment in schools. Tirana parents claimed some teachers accepted cash gifts of thousands of lek, or expensive gifts of clothing or jewelry, in return for giving good grades.

Poor children were less able to purchase textbooks, and more likely to come to class without supplies or to share them with others. Poor children were less able to take private lessons, either prepare for university exams or for jobs requiring computer skills and foreign languages. Families perceived this as a huge disadvantage, and felt that without lessons, their children’s chances for entering university were zero.

Migration: the new response to poverty

One of the most visible impacts of poverty on youth has been the pressure on boys to leave school. They either drop out, or are pulled out by the parents, to earn money. In some areas, the boys remain with their families, helping with agriculture, stockbreeding, or construction work. The majority go abroad, mainly to Greece or Italy, reviving the Ottoman era tradition of “kurbel” (poverty migration), when it was customary for extended families to send at least one of their young men to work abroad to send money home. Today, much of the Albanian population lives on remittances from young men working abroad. As a result, male school enrollment has significantly decreased compared to that of girls, who now outnumber them almost 2:1 in some high schools.

Interestingly, some poor families have prioritized their daughters’ education. In some cases, even when their sons were good students, parents made a strategic decision to send them abroad to work so they could at least afford to keep their daughters in school. Such parents explained that they saw education as their daughters’ only chances to obtain employment, while boys had more options
because they could migrate. A poor northern parent calculated that her daughter's school expenses ate up a third of her salary, which had to support a family of four. She therefore decided to keep her daughter in school, but send her two sons abroad so they could earn money and help the family "normalize its life."

REGIONAL INEQUITIES:
THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL EDUCATION

The deficiencies of rural education

About 50% of the Albanian population still lives in rural areas, despite the rapid and ongoing urbanization since 1990, when Albanians acquire the freedom of movement within the country. During the socialist era, the Albanian regime was intent on achieving agricultural self-sufficiency, and therefore heavily subsidized rural areas. The state also practiced a form of affirmative action, paying for rural students to come to the universities so that some could return as teachers. Despite this policy, rural areas were not able to supply enough teachers, which meant at the state assigned new teachers from urban areas to work in villages. Many of these "outsiders" never fully integrated, and lacked the advantages enjoyed by educated "insiders" who had long-established relations with local power holders. When this restrictive policy of mandatory work assignments ended, teachers, large numbers of doctors and other professionals left these isolated and often inaccessible villages, and it has become extremely difficult to recruit replacements. Where teachers commuted from nearby towns, many left the school early for their second job in the cities. The remaining teachers often find themselves teaching subjects for which they are not prepared.

"Before, teachers were considered the smartest people in the village, they had good and secure salaries. Now, they are among the poorest people. They are paid low salaries, and they cannot make extra money from private courses because we in the village cannot afford paying for these courses. Therefore, they have neglected their work in school and all they think about is finding a better paid job in town." Parent of a student in Kamza.

Today, students living in rural regions are at a serious disadvantage compared to urban counterparts. Village students must often walk for up to 2 hours each way on narrow, unpaved and rutted roads. They are frequently late to school. In winter, snow or rain often make the roads completely impassible, preventing the children from even reaching the school. Far from the centers of power, rural schools tend to be in worse condition than urban ones. They are more poorly equipped and they have less access to contemporary teaching materials. They also have less ability to raise and mobilize resources, because local populations are, for the most part, poorer than the more heterogeneous urban populations. Even large village schools lack teachers, particularly in special areas such foreign languages.

Rural students also have more difficulty obtaining school materials. For one thing, the distribution system for textbooks and other materials works poorly in rural areas. In several northern

In rural communities, the rate of students continuing higher education is much lower than in urban areas. Bushat teachers estimated that about 10% of their students planned to continue on to higher education. In nearby Shkodra, about three quarters of the students have been continuing on to higher education, the majority at the University of Shkodra, the rest in Tirana or abroad (in Jordan, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, or Italy). In major urban areas such as Tirana or Gjirokastra, up to 70% of their students were said to continue their education after high school.

School attitudes toward rural students

Even in more stable communities, our informants noted that urban teachers demonstrated disdain and indifference toward the children who came from nearby villages. The situation was worse in middle schools in rural areas, which drew on children from particularly remote villages, where the level of academic achievement was much lower. According to some teachers, some of these children could not even read properly. Students in village schools near towns in both north and south complained that most of their teachers, who commuted to work from town, wanted to leave as soon as the school day ended. They were uninterested in helping their more talented students or in giving university preparatory courses in the village. Some students felt that teachers tended to pass poorly performing students, mainly those from villages, to get rid of them and avoid dealing with them the following year.

In a small northern parents and students felt that the teachers who commuted from the nearby city looked down on the students coming to the town from nearby villages. The teachers even kept themselves apart from the teachers living in the town, leaving even before the end of the school day in order to catch the last bus. Students cited the city teachers’ attitudes toward the students from the villages as “You guys are thick-headed, not fit for school, and you should look after your cattle.” Students felt that urban teachers dismissed rural students as incapable no matter how interested or capable they were, and did not provide any sort of help to those who were interested in higher education. Teachers living in small towns, however, communicated somewhat more easily with village families, in part because these families have sometimes provided them with agricultural produce in exchange for passing their children.

Village students in a northern school accused the principal of dividing classes according to parental income. One class was for children of businessmen or parents working abroad, who could afford to buy their textbooks and pay for private lessons. The students felt this had created an atmosphere of envy and pessimism in the other class, where the students came from poorer families, mainly from outlying villages. Likewise, the parents felt that by putting the best students together in a single class, the school was providing the best opportunities for those who already had the most academic advantages.

School attitudes toward rural parents

According to some village school principals, village parents were less interested in their children’s
education and rarely contacted the school. They attributed parental noninvolvement to a rural mentality that placed little emphasis on education. These parents neither attended the regular monthly meetings between teachers and parents, nor made financial contributions to improve the environment of their children's school. In one such small town, out of 600 families, the principal said, fewer than 100 parents attended regularly parent-teacher meetings. The principal complained that village parents not only failed to contribute financially to the school, they did not help to guard the school in the summer. The principal even suspected village parents of participating in the thefts from the school that took place during the summer holidays.

Teaching staff sometimes blamed village parent's disinterest in their children's education, and complained that they did not even attend the monthly parent-teacher meetings. Both urban and rural parents, on the other hand, felt that it was difficult to keep up with school demands for monthly meetings because they were too busy trying to make ends meet. Many small town schools did not even schedule regular meetings with parents. In some cases, parents who lived in the town often ran into local teachers on the street, and could exchange news. But village parents lacked even this opportunity.

INTERNAL MIGRATION AND
THE EXCLUSION OF "OUTSIDERS"

The rural-urban flow

During the socialist period, Albanians had little freedom of movement within their own country and were required to stay in the community in which they had received job assignments. Despite large state subsidies for support to rural areas, a large gap in living conditions as well as mentality existed between rural and town or city populations. Rural-urban tensions have taken on a new form since the end of socialism, when rural Albanians started leaving their villages for larger towns and cities in search of employment and better living conditions. In many cities, the "newcomers" have settled in peri-urban, semi-squatter communities, such as Kamza or Bathore outside Tirana, where they form distinctive communities.

Town and city populations tend to look down on the migrants, particularly "newcomers," those from the northeastern districts, as backward, ignorant, uncivilized, prone to feuding and violence. According to some informants, this disdain is further augmented because of the extraordinary rapidity of this migration. After forty years of enforced residential stability, most people are unused to such diverse and "heterogeneous" communities. And, given the social structure of Albanian society, with its strong emphasis on closed social groups, people tend to view "outsiders" with inherent suspicion.

School Attitudes toward students from rural migrants from the north

Our informants were uniformly negative about the impact on the school of what they termed the "displaced" population of rural migrants. Most of them distinguished among the migrants in terms of place of origin. As the vice-principal of a school in Kamza explained, families from northeast Albania had been driven out by extreme poverty, and were so poor their children often lacked the bare necessities for school. Those from southern Albania, by contrast, had come to cities such as Tirana in search of greater opportunities and a better life, and their children were more motivated academically.
Teachers, principals, parents, and teachers students characterized migrant youth from the northeast as poorly prepared academically, unmotivated in school, and most likely to drop out. These students were unable to purchase textbooks and other school supplies, and often lacked adequate clothing for school. Teaching staff acknowledged that these students came from very large families, where the parents were so occupied with scraping together a living they were unable to pay much attention to their children's education, and even encouraged their children to leave school and start earning money.

Shkodra parents blamed migrants from the Dukagjin Highlands for the troubles in their school. Their children didn't study, they performed poorly, they came to school without their books, insulted their teachers, quarreled with their schoolmates, and sometimes even came to school armed. The parents ascribed their "brutal and aggressive character" to disrespect toward rule of law, poor rural schools which lacked discipline, and families so large the parents were unable to exert care or control.

A Tirana principal observed, "These children don't attend class, they don't study, they fight in the classroom, they are very impulsive, and the teachers and other students in the class find it difficult to communicate with them. They come from the regions of the northeast, such as Tropoja, Kukesi, Mirdita. They keep to themselves, smoke, and drink. Their families don't care about school; they think that the teachers will let them pass just to get rid of them. If their children are expelled, they will start working because they need money."

Some teaching staff voiced overt dislike of these migrant "outsiders," whom they held responsible for introducing bad behaviors into the school. More empathetic teachers understood that the migrant families had many problems, including unemployment and homelessness, which made it difficult for their children to adjust to their new communities. Some spoke dialects that made it difficult for them to understand the more literary Albanian that the teachers spoke; many had serious reading and writing deficiencies from rural schools. The "outsiders" clearly felt uncomfortable in their new surroundings, were not particularly welcomed by the local population, and therefore tended to socialize only with each other.

Many teachers implied that dealing with these difficult children was simply beyond their mandate, and felt that unless the school system compensated them, they should not be expected to give them special help. A principal observed that "since the government does not pay for their extra work, the education of this category is considered neither rewarding nor satisfying." Teachers felt that the "deficiencies" of these students disrupted lessons, because they could no longer assume that all their students had mastered the same level of concepts. Indeed, one way that many of the schools dealt with this category of students was to expel them for excessive truancy, but usually with the knowledge that once expelled, most of the boys would enter the labor force.

A parent in Kamza, home to many migrants, criticized teachers for singling out such students because of their poor academic preparation, lack of school supplies, and irregular school attendance, and the fact that they came to school without books, treating them poorly and speaking to them insultingly. "That category of students, even those from northern Albania, are not troublemakers by virtue of their nature, but it is rather the local population's unaccepting attitude that makes them become aggressive and unsociable" a Tirana parent observed. These parents felt teachers should give these children more "psychological assistance" so they would not abandon school for the bars and the streets.
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE EDUCATION

Gender attitudes among teaching staff and students present a complex picture in which "traditional" and "contemporary," rural and urban values mingle. Ethnographers of Albania have remarked on the extreme patriarchal values which particularly dominated in rural, mountainous areas, in which women occupy a clearly subservient position in terms of power and authority within households. Urban women and girls, however, enjoy considerably more latitude of behavior. As early as the 1930s, during the Zogu period, the National Education organization was founded, both to encourage the physical, moral and civil education of youth, and specifically to encourage comradeship between boys and girls to counteract women's traditionally low status in Albanian society. During the Hoxha regime, girls further benefited from the push for complete literacy and labor force participation.

There was complete unanimity among interviewed school staff, parents, and teachers, that girls were more serious, studied harder and more enthusiastically, and they came to class with the right materials and completed assignments. Most, although not all, informants felt that although girls enjoyed learning, boys were more intelligent. According to teachers in Kamza, "girls work harder than boys do. They are more systematic than boys are because they have to bridge the gaps in their level of intelligence." Some informants thought that since girls' behavior was more closely scrutinized, they tended to spend more time at home and therefore had more time to study. Most teachers preferred girls in the classroom. They felt that girls were better behaved, more pleasant, and reasonable. Village students explained that given a "village mentality," frowns on girls for laughing and joking, particularly with boys present, their classroom behavior is more docile. By contrast, boys were seen as more "restless," harder to control, inattentive, and largely disinterested in school.

"In general, girls are more inclined to study, but the boys who really do study are better than the girls." A principal

CLASSROOM RELATIONS

Some students said that particularly the older teachers — "the ones who should have retired long ago" — treated boys and girls differently in the classroom. They were prone to "insult" female students wearing miniskirts, and to check up more thoroughly on their work. Girls in Kamza felt boys were at an advantage with male teachers, whom they would see outside school hours and "win over" by treating them at a bar. As a result, girls felt more comfortable with female teachers.

Parents of boys, however, felt that boys were often treated more poorly, and this, in turn, encouraged them to play truant or leave school, particularly given new opportunities to migrate. They felt that much of the problem lay in communication. Given the very hierarchical and authoritarian atmosphere that still characterizes many schools, they felt teachers were likelier to speak harshly, even

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26 Hall. 1994.
strike, boys, while girls were simply scolded. In some environments, appearing studious made boys vulnerable to teasing from peers. Students in a small town commented that even those boys who remembered to bring textbooks to class sometimes hid them to avoid teasing.

“There are differences between the boys and girls at school which don’t just relate to their preparation and attitude towards school, but also to the way teachers treat them. Some teachers communicate differently with boys and girls. They might be nicer with girls, but tougher with boys, and it is due to the lack of communication that many boys skip classes or drop out of school.” Kamza parents

GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Differences in urban and rural norms and expectations affect attitudes toward girls’ higher education. Urban parents were likelier to declare that girls and boys had the same ability and right to pursue their education; most teachers agreed that girls were as ambitious if not more so than boys. A Tirana principal explained that parental interest in girls’ education was an Albanian tradition because people believed that boys would make their own way in life, while girls needed to be protected more. Moreover, boys were more independent and parents were unable to pressure them to pursue their education. Urban parents felt education was particularly important for girls, because they would be models for their families. A Tirana principal thought that girls viewed education as a means to “compensate for their delicacy,” to avoid become housewives; and to ensure some independence from men.

“Girls have higher expectations in school since they relate everything to school, that the school will provide a profession and a secure social position for them, whereas boys don’t consider themselves as having a future there. The difficult economic situation and high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, have vanquished their expectations and forced them to seek a way out by emigrating wherever they can find better chances for employment.” Students in Bushat.

In the studied schools, girls formed the majority of students hoping to pursue higher education. In Pogradec, girls had outnumbered boys university-bound six to one, and 12 of the 13 students who enrolled in university from a northern town high school were female. Informants felt that boys looked to migration to solve immediate and future economic problems, because they felt that intellectuals had lost their advantages. In Gjirokastra, teachers estimated that seventy percent of the boys would emigrate to Greece after graduation. Those boys that continued education, however, usually went in to engineering or the hard sciences, partly because there is less competition, and sometimes they can enter without exams. Girls consider these fields less appropriate, and preferred teaching and social sciences.

“80 percent of the boys do poorly academically. Only two or three male students in each class get good results. Female students are more ambitious and more female students attend university. There are very few jobs for girls to who not continue their higher education. Finding jobs in Greece or Italy, or working in Albania constitute the male student’s ambitious. Very few of them continue their higher education.” Teachers in Fier.
Restrictions faced by girls

In small towns, informants noted that although almost all of the girls wanted to continue their schooling, some families “still held onto the old mentality” and pressured them to marry instead. In Kamza, where much of the school population consisted of migrants from the northeast, the girls who dropped out were those most unprepared by the poor quality of the education they had received, and least able to withstand the higher requirements of urban schools. Kamza teachers added that when boys left school, they generally found work or helped their fathers; girls from village families, which place less value on girls’ education, stayed at home to help with domestic tasks. In the northern community of Bushar, teaching staff observed that some poor families pressured their daughters to marry at age 15 or 16, to lighten their family’s economic burden, and that marriage became a reason for girls to leave school. Even those who become engaged tend to remain at home after finishing school, because their fiancés could countenance the idea that they would leave the village, or mingle with other men in university classrooms.

Girls from poor families, especially in rural areas, had fewer possibilities to earn the money to pay for their education. While boys can go abroad to work and save money for university, girls are much more restricted by their families. As a Pogradec student explained, “there is no work in Albania, and as for leaving for Greece, don’t even mention it. Village opinion would punish girls very badly, and even thought they might engage in honest work, they would remain prostitutes to the villagers, simply because they had gone abroad to work.” By the same token, girls were more limited in their choice of institutes of higher learning, either preferring or being required to stay close to home. Boys, by contrast, have more freedom to go to other cities or Tirana.

“Many students who would have preferred to study subjects other than those offered by Korca University cannot make their dream come true... For instance, a girl who was very talented in literature, who wrote poems and fiction and was very interested in writing techniques as well, didn’t study literature because her parents couldn’t afford to send her to university in Tirana. That’s quite opposite with the boys who find themselves in the same situation. Generally they go to Greece to work for a certain period and make some money for their future studies” Principal in Korca.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

The school and community

Stakeholders largely view schools as institutions divorced from the “community,” and functioning primarily as agents of the state. During the socialist period, the state exerted thorough and oppressive control over public institutions, including schools. Today, the Ministry of Education continues to exert control over most aspects of education. Not only is the education system dependent on the state and central government, its workings exemplify the polarization and politicization of Albanian society. Thus, power shifts in Tirana result in personnel changes down to the level of school principals, with consequent disruption of the education process.

Given this centralized structure, school “collectives,” principals, and teachers have little autonomy or authority. Principals, most of whom had no specialized training for their position, have little authority beyond day-to-day management. They did not know their school budget and had virtually no input into curriculum design or staffing decisions. Teaching staff also lacked input into curriculum, content of courses, or choice of textbooks.

What do principals want?

More scope: to enforce school rules, to hire and fire teachers
More autonomy: from the Ministry of Education, from parents (demanding favors), from politically-motivated demands
Order and orderliness in the school

Schools do not serve any function in the community, except for educating the youth. Although schools serve as polling stations, in only few cases did schools engage with the neighborhoods in which they were located. Thus, a Tirana school staff said they occasionally invited neighborhood families to a lecture of general interest, and another school was planning to build a hall, with help from Soros, with potential for some community use. The only exception, noted in Shkodra and several other communities, occurred during the Kosovo refugee crisis, when schools became collection centers for assistance. For informants, this was a proud but short-lived moment.

Most school-level stakeholders feel they have very little voice in the education process. They are convinced that all principals and some teaching staff are decided by party or social group affiliation rather than by merit. Although many central decisions and regulations are, in fact, manipulated at the school level, stakeholders interpret school-related decisions and actions as the result of personalistic relationships and “connections.”
Parents also lack voice in the education system. They are not expected to exert any influence over curriculum or course content — nor do they feel they have the right to do so. At most, parents try to intervene individually to insure fair (or special) treatment for their own children, and to help raise funds. Parent's lack of voice is particularly marked in rural areas, where parents tend to be less educated, encounter disdainful attitudes from the teaching staff, find it difficult to come to school during working hours, and less inclined to see the value of education. Although urban, educated and more prosperous parents have more choice — where to enroll their child, to pay for private lessons, to informally influence teachers' treatment of their children, even they have little voice in the education process itself.

### What do parents want?

- Safety in the communities and in the schools
- Better treatment for their children – less harassment or evident favoritism
- Curricula and better quality courses more suited to current market demands
- Teachers who communicate well with them and their children
- Teachers who are dedicated and motivated
- Equal opportunities for their children, even if they cannot afford to pay for extra courses

### Access and Equity

One of the greatest concerns for all stakeholders is the continuing lack of security and safety. The inability of the state to maintain order and protect youth against violence and the lure of organized crime takes a toll on education. Perception about the level of crime varied among sites, as did the actual security situation. Nevertheless, fears that sons may become involved in organized crime, and girls be harassed or kidnapped, has led parents to restrict their children's involvement in extracurricular activities, prevent daughters from pursuing a higher education, and in some cases, keep their children home from school.

### What do all stakeholders want?

- Greater security on the streets and in the schools
- Schools in good repair, with functioning heating systems, toilets, adequate furniture, and well equipped libraries, laboratories, and gyms

Students from poor families are at a severe disadvantage in schools. First, they cannot purchase basic school materials, and must share, copy, or do without. Second, they cannot pay for supplementary tutoring increasingly necessary for preparing for admission examinations for institutes of higher education. Third, even if they were to gain admission, few can afford the formal and informal expenses associated with higher education. Fourth, informants uniformly noted that students from well-connected or prosperous families, particularly those who contribute financially to the school, appear to treated better by teaching staff.
Rural students, both poor and non-poor, form a cross-cutting category of disadvantaged students. They face multiple disadvantages of limited access to good schools and good teachers (due to the outflow of experienced teachers from rural areas, and their replacement by relatively unqualified teachers). With the decline of rural schools and reduced access to transportation, rural children must often trek for hours on primitive roads that are impassable in winter. Also, the rural population is generally poorer and less educated than the urban populations. Not only do poor rural youth have the usual disadvantages of poverty, but many of their urban-trained teachers view them as less intelligent and unmotivated, and have self-fulfillingly low expectations of them.

The most overtly excluded students in our study were from families that have migrated from the impoverished, rural districts, usually in the northeast, into larger cities. Urban informants view these regions, now infamous for revival of blood feuds, as backward, and the boys from this region as aggressive troublemakers. Principals, teachers, students, and parents were alike in singling them out for their poor academic preparation (in some cases complicated by dialect differences), general disinterest in school, and aggressively disruptive school behavior. While not disruptive, the girls were poorly prepared academically, and often succumbed to parental pressure to leave school for early marriage.

While Roma were not discussed by any of our stakeholders, they also constitute an impoverished and marginalized group. In part, they may be less “visible” because they move about the country, relying on artisanal skills, and often remain unregistered locally. In some cities, they live in readily identifiable “gypsy quarters,” and tend to receive the blame for violence and vandalism.

The gender balance in schools has shifted dramatically as a result of migration. Boys from poor families are dropping out because they cannot afford school related expenses and no longer view education as guaranteeing employment. Large numbers of poor and non-poor boys are migrating abroad in search of employment. In most of the studied schools, girls therefore outnumbered boys. Informants all felt that girls were more studious, motivated, successful and academically ambitious than boys. Despite this recognition, informants also acknowledged that girls faced many obstacles to pursuing higher education. Among educated and/or ambitious families, limitations arose mainly from parental fears for their security. Among families with a rural origin, daughters were under pressure, often for financial reasons, to leave school for early marriage. During periods of unrest, parents everywhere were more likely to keep girls at home. Parents in provincial towns were less willing to allow their girls to go to Tirana for an education. Thus, while overt gender discrimination did not appear to be an issue in the studied schools, lack of security (and parental fears) limits the educational aspirations of girls. At the same time, possibilities of earning money through emigration, and sometimes parental pressure to go abroad, confronts boys with analogous obstacles to pursuing higher education.

The classroom experience

Some schools have remained virtual shells, with leaky roofs, broken windows, and little furniture. Previously well-equipped schools now function without science or language laboratories, gyms, or libraries. The physical state of schools also makes it physically uncomfortable and difficult to study, and finally, cannot support the curricula necessary for a modern economy.

28 Personal communication, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, from fieldwork in Pogradec.
### What do teachers want?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adequate pay</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More classroom autonomy in how to develop and teach a given course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved and more extensive in-service training</td>
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<tr>
<td>The same level of respect and prestige as before 1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depoliticization of the hiring process</td>
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<td>Protection from parental pressure or threats</td>
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Students and parents felt the curriculum was overloaded, while its content did not prepare students for the labor market or allow them to develop and pursue their own interests. Students were uniformly critical of the disconnect between school and work. They wanted more computer science, foreign languages, and courses that would provide skills in demand. They were also criticized the fact that schools were so poorly equipped that courses in computer science were taught without computers, and language classes were not backed up with language labs.

### What do students want?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Better classroom conditions: well-equipped schools in good repair</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curricula that is less theoretical and abstract, more practical and job-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lighter curriculum, with more electives and the option to choose their own programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>More genuine input into the education process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendlier, less authoritarian teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair treatment, including the abolition of favoritism toward richer students</td>
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<tr>
<td>More attention to the issues that affect them — employment, crime, drugs, prostitution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most teachers continue to be guided by a traditional philosophy of teaching that instills respect for authority through distant and hierarchical behavior. Students uniformly complained about their teachers' "authoritarian" behavior and lack of understanding for their problems. They felt that some of the younger teachers were harsher than older ones, because they were too inexperienced to maintain their authority without brutality. At the same time, a number of Soros-trained teachers expressed interest in new methodologies, and a few - particularly sociology teachers - received praise for organizing debates and discussions, which students preferred to the traditional lecturing and testing.

Although education has been officially "de-ideologized," the production and content of social science and humanities textbooks remains politicized, and the content appears to emerge from party-related pressures to promote one or the other interpretation of history and society. Some stakeholders also criticized the social science curriculum for being out of touch with daily realities. Few schools took a proactive role in responding to the problems
of youth. Most schools deal with such problems, including drug use or distribution among their students, or involvement in other dangerous and/or illicit activities, by excluding students from the school collective, rather than developing coherent programs for dealing with the situation. Although a few teachers had organized programs against drug use, students criticized these as simply moralistic lectures. Otherwise, principals and teachers focused on the inculcation of “patriotism” by exposing students to Albanian folklore, traditions, history, and nationalist literature to counter their sense of inferiority and depression about the future.

Teaching staff acknowledged that their schools lacked systematic contacts with other schools, whether with the schools which fed into them, or the schools or institutes of higher education to which their students were likely to move. In some cases, schools did not see this as a problem. High school teachers, particularly in the mathematics and sciences, however, did complain that middle school textbooks did not prepare middle school students for high school, and that teachers had to devote extra energy bringing students up to the expected level. Schools lacked systematic contacts with the labor market and did not provide counseling or advice to students about their future after school. School staff did not keep any systematic records of or demonstrate much interest in tracking their students after graduation.

How teachers cope: the education system’s “shadow economy”

One of the most serious blows to the Albanian education system has been the large exodus of qualified and experienced teachers. Some teachers have remained in the system, however, by using second jobs, including private tutoring, to supplement their earnings. Given the scale of private tutoring, it seems to have become more than just a coping strategy. Some informants considered it an emergent form of private education, particularly in depressed regions whose population could not support private schools. However, in other ways, far from being an independent system, tutoring is firmly embedded in and enmeshed with the public education system. This practice is similar to that of many socialist countries, where state employees used their positions and access to state materials to support private enterprises, and closely resembles the same practice in the education systems of some post-Soviet countries.29

Tutoring has allowed many teachers to continue working in their profession, by allowing them to supplement meager salaries by working at convenient hours. In Tirana, teachers who earn 8,000 to 14,000 lek a month, depending on their own experience and where they work, may charge students up to 500 lek an hour for private lessons. However, because tutoring has become an important adjunct to public full-time employment, teachers are less willing than ever to work in villages, since most of their private students live in urban areas. Those teachers who still commute from cities or large towns to rural areas therefore tend to leave the school as early as possible to commute to the city, where they tutor. Thus, many teachers working in rural areas are no longer fully engaged in their work, but deflect time and energy toward their private tutoring work.

Teachers are able to use their positions in the state school system to create a “market” for their services, either by creating a reputation for excellence, or by overtly threatening to fail students. Teachers benefit directly from the inadequacies of the public education system, and this could give them a vested interest in its continued inadequacy, or at least, in the public perception of its inadequacy. Indeed, most parents were quite convinced that it was impossible to pass the university entrance examination in Albania, much less

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29 See, for example, Helen Shahriari. Georgia: Social Assessment of Education. 1998.
enroll in a foreign university, without private tutoring. Most informants concurred in seeing a distinct ethical “line” between tutoring students from other classes or schools, and providing private lessons to students from one’s own classes in the public schools.

*Tutoring provides an affordable alternative to expensive private education, but has the potential to accentuate inequities.* Private classes can potentially supplement the public school curriculum by providing courses public schools are not, at present, able to offer, or by helping students who have difficulties mastering their school work. At present, however, tutoring also contributes to growing inequities in the school system and by extension, to education-related socioeconomic stratification. Only relatively prosperous parents, or well-educated parents willing to make serious sacrifices for their children's education, can pay for private lessons for their children. Our informants considered that private tutoring not only gave more prosperous students a significant advantage in entering university, but also to the job market. Tutoring also adds to disparities between urban and rural areas in access to quality education. Even rural students who could afford the price of the lessons must add the price of transportation to the cost of private lessons. Many rural parents in our study were concerned that if they did not pay for private classes, their children would not be able to enter university.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Designing educational reform

Education reform projects should be designed in close collaboration with reform projects in other sectors. Many of the problems facing the public education system in Albania are beyond the capacity or authority of the education sector to solve by itself. Schools systems in modern societies depend on reliable supplies of electricity, heat, and water. Particularly in rural areas, schools depend on roads being maintained and passable; urban schools depend on municipal transportation. And, very important for Albanian stakeholders, the ability of students to get to school and feel safe there largely depends on the state's ability to maintain order and security. In some cases, this might involve police reform, as well as attention to zoning near schools, to discourage the establishment of the pool and bingo halls parents associate with gang activity and crime.

Given the particularity of Albanian conditions, as well as long-traditions of public non-involvement, detailed recommendations must be developed in close collaboration with stakeholders. In the interest of creating ownership, the following recommendations are general, and do not specify details. These must emerge from a process of ongoing and intensive consultation with Albanian stakeholders. One step could be to translate and disseminate this and other reports contributing to the education sector study for public discussion and debate before formulating the details of the following recommendations.

Transparency and accountability

Measures to increase transparency and accountability are critical for building trust in a society characterized by endemic suspicions of outsiders, and should accompany all stages of the reform process. Because perceptions are as important as reality in this field, it is not only important that transparency and accountability exist, they must be seen to exist to counter prevalent tendencies to explain events in terms of conspiracy and corruption (even when neither are involved). Given the tendency, for example, of students and parents to explain grades, university admission, and other forms of evaluation by claiming that favoritism or prejudice was at work, measures encouraging transparency and accountability should be designed in close collaboration with stakeholders, and correspond to the kinds of appointment and/or evaluation procedures they accept as fair.

Any reform project should build in mechanisms for extensive and ongoing information-sharing. This could be in the form of brief newsletters, local press releases, radio and TV discussions, posting of announcements, and/or public meetings (the latter were successful, for example, in publicizing the Rural Development Fund project in Albania).

Rebuilding and rehabilitation of schools

Reform should combine a significant bricks and mortar component with community building,
The terrible condition of Albanian schools, together with the lack of basic equipment, impede the learning process and reduce morale and incentives for staff and students. Projects which involve rebuilding, rehabilitation and/or provision of school equipment should therefore be designed to involve the community (school staff, students and their parents, and parents living near the school) in project design, from prioritizing school needs, to deciding between alternatives, even to contributing labor in specific areas of building and/or maintenance. In addition, such projects should incorporate practices of complete accountability and transparency in all processes of consultation, decision-making, and budgeting. The Soros experience should be explored to see what guidance it can provide. If parents take on responsibility for regular fund-raising to purchase equipment, they should be provided guidance in transparent priority-setting, decision-making, and budgeting, and encouraging to make accounts open to public scrutiny.

Curriculum and textbook reform

Middle and secondary school curricula, course content and quality should be brought in line with market and university demands, with due regard for local and individual needs and priorities. This move would be strongly supported by many stakeholders, and requires close and ongoing consultation with them. If curricula and course content are to be more responsive to student needs, decision-making must be brought closer to the level of the school; curricula should also be more flexible to allow students to develop their own interests and abilities.

Secondary schools should coordinate more closely with universities, to ensure that university-bound students are receiving the appropriate preparation for university entrance. More coordination, better preparation – and, given student and parental anxieties – demonstrable evidence that secondary school preparation was sufficient for preparing for entrance exams — would reduce the need for private tutoring (a source of inequity and a barrier to access). Schools should inaugurate some form of systematic counseling for students about post-graduation options.

Textbook production would benefit from the increased participation of teachers, who have day to day experience in using them. Textbook production should be closely linked to curriculum reform, so that textbooks for each class build upon the knowledge that students are expected to have from their previous class.

Possibly in conjunction with parallel projects in judicial reform, health reform, and others, the schools should more directly address the critical social problems that most worry students and families. These include security issues and crime (drugs, prostitution, and gangs). Schools have taken some initiatives in conjunction with NGOs, but this should be expanded upon and supported, possibly by making professional counselors or social workers also available to schools on a regular basis.

Given the critical ideological importance that social science and literature textbooks in particular will play in shaping attitudes of young Albanians toward their neighbors, it is important that educators rethink the basic lessons in close discussion with their peers in neighboring countries. In the interests of reducing future Balkan conflicts, textbooks should create a positive rather than exclusivist or nationalist message about the relationship of Albania to its neighbors. Education reform should support those educators from Balkan countries who have already begun to think about rewriting history
textbooks through an initiative of the Association for Democracy in the Balkans. This effort could be further supported by the introduction of new communications technologies, such as Internet, to facilitate inter-Balkan and international contacts among educators.

**Teaching quality and professional development**

To attract talented university graduates to teaching, to retain experienced teachers, and importantly, to reduce incentives for teachers to become involved in demanding second jobs or to abuse their authority by demanding bribes, teaching salaries must be raised. Moreover, salary schedules and merit raises should provide incentives for teachers to improve their skills, to demonstrate initiative, and put energy into their work.

In-service teacher training should be provided, not only to raise skill levels, but provide an additional incentive for teachers and students. Training should be decentralized, possibly with the assistance of long-distance learning approaches, so that rural teachers do not have to travel to Tirana for brief sessions which may be stimulating but lack follow-up. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training should be developed through close collaboration with teachers and other educators, so that it reflects their needs and priorities as well as an overall education strategy. New methodologies would also appeal to students, and encourage them to remain in school. The methodologies, however, should also be developed in tandem with a new curriculum, so that stakeholders understand their relevance to every kind of subject (rather than assuming they do not apply to the sciences, for example). Both pre-service and in-service training must address the hierarchical and authoritarian relationships that still characterize some school environments, with due respect to local expectations and desires, as well as intergenerational differences.

**Institutional relationships and responsibilities**

Education positions should be more professionalized (through special courses for principals, for example) and depoliticized (by publishing criteria, advertising jobs, and opening the hiring and firing process to greater scrutiny), so that administrators and teachers feel secure in their jobs, and less prone to intimidation from their superiors, or from parents. This would encourage them to invest more in the success of their schools, and to develop and follow longer-term strategies. Principals should be empowered with more information (about budgets, for example), and more ability to make substantive input into staffing decisions. Principals and teaching staff should also have more flexibility in terms of scheduling, school hours, and so forth.

To take on greater responsibilities, principals and vice principals should receive training in school management, fundraising, budgeting and efficient use of resources. This training could build upon and extend the experience of other donors, such as Soros, in providing such training.

Parent-teacher councils, parent boards, and student governments should be encouraged, but with due regard to local expectations about what parents and/or students stakeholders think is appropriate and desirable. This encouragement should therefore build on the experience of what is already working in Albania, rather than importing models of good parent-teacher relationships from very different countries. A Bank project might contribute to this by organizing periodic forums, in
connection with education reform projects, that bring together stakeholders within a district to discuss education-related issues.

**Increasing equity and access**

While closing small, run-down and ill-equipped rural schools may be cost-effective, such rationalization should be accompanied by measures that ensure that the access of rural children to school is maintained or improved. Ensuring such access may involve rehabilitation of rural roads, and/or introduction of reliable, low-cost or subsidized public transportation. For more viable rural schools, it may be necessary to provide special incentives in the form of university scholarships, salaries, and/or housing to attract competent teachers in necessary subjects. Distance learning technologies could be introduced for subjects such as foreign languages, when schools are unable to find qualified teachers.

Measures must be taken to restore the access of rural children to higher education, to counter the growing disparity between urban and rural children. This would include improving the capacity of rural schools to prepare young people for higher education, helping rural students manage expenses of textbooks and school supplies, and providing more extensive information (not otherwise available in rural areas) and outreach to talented rural youth concerning available opportunities and scholarships for advanced training or education.

The severe marginalization of rural migrants in cities, as well as of Roma, require a proactive attempt to break the cycle of exclusion and self-exclusion. Such attempts, which NGOs could assist or manage, should involve extensive outreach to these groups. In addition, they could involve (i) sensitizing teachers to issues of exclusion through pre-service and in-service training, (ii) remedial education for rural children to remedy inadequacies of their academic preparation in poor rural schools; (iii) as an alternative to pool and bingo halls and other street attractions, the school could provide, or at least house, activities such as sports, movies, concerts, discotheques, adult education, and/or skills training of interest to young people and/or their families.

**Monitoring**

It will be critical to carefully monitor trends in Albanian education, as well as the impact of new measures, for the ongoing evaluation and improvement of reform. Areas to be monitored would include:

- Inequity (along regional, rural/urban, gender, and/or ethnic lines) in the following areas: curricula (extent of and quality of offerings in different regions); school attendance; and school performance (evaluated through a national assessment of achievement)
- Forms and degree of community (carefully defined) and parental involvement
- The sense of ownership and satisfaction or dissatisfaction among stakeholders
- Transparency and accountability of the reform process (through brief public surveys among stakeholders)
ANNEX I: STUDY SITES

Fier district (pop. 110,000) is located on the western plains, between central and southern Albania, and includes 3 towns, including Fier city, and 100 villages. After the collapse of socialism, industry collapsed and large numbers emigrated. Much of the population now survives on remittances from Italy, Greece, and Germany, and subsistence farming. During the events of 1991 and 1997, the city of Fier suffered considerably from destruction of property and increased crime. Fier has 15 high schools.

Gjirokastra is an ancient city in southern Albania, bordering Greece, with a significant ethnic Greek and smaller Vlach community. Gjirokastra district population is 40,000. Since 1990, many ethnic Greeks migrated to Greece, some permanently, others seasonally. 40,000 ethnic Greeks are estimated to have remained permanently in Albania in the cities of Gjirokastra, Permet, and Saranda.

Korca district (pop. 140,000) is located in the east, along large fertile plains. It includes, two cities and 160 villages. The city of Korca is located on one of the important crossroads near highways linking Greece with the rest of Albania. Established in the 9th century, Korca played a key role in the Albanian nationalist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first school in Albania was opened in Korca at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1991 and 1997, Korca experienced less destruction than other parts of Albania, although 1997 witnessed the emergence of considerable criminal gang activity. In spite of this, 1997 caused a great turmoil, especially the flourishing of gangs. Trading activities have started to flourish again after two years of stagnation. The population includes Muslims and Orthodox Albanians. Roma make up 5-6% of the population; they live in poor conditions on the outskirts of the city. Korca has one university, five high schools and 80 middle schools.

Mirdita district (pop. 35,000), in northern Albania is an almost entirely Catholic region covering 3 towns and 61 villages. It is a mountainous, mineral-rich area. Since the end of socialism, the developed industrial and agricultural enterprises have suffered. People now survive from small family farms, limited services, and internal and external migration. Mirdita has 3 high and 44 middle schools. Rreshen (pop. 6,000) is the administrative center of Mirdita district.

Pogradec city is located in Eastern Albania, bordering the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), near Lake Ohrid. Pogradec district (pop. 32,000) is spread among the city of Pogradec and 64 villages. Once home to many industries, today Pogradec is mainly characterized by subsistence agriculture, trade with FYROM and Greece, trout fishing, and some small businesses. Pogradec has two high schools and 37 middle schools. Bucimas village located near Pogradec, near the Greek border.

Shkodra (pop. 80,000), in northwest Albania, is one of the oldest cities with long-standing ties to Italy and a mixed Muslim and Catholic population. The district of Shkodra (pop. 150,000) includes
two cities and about 150 village. Located on Shkodra Lake, the district borders Montenegro. Shkodra and its Catholic population is known for its staunch resistance to communism; in the 1990s, Shkodra was one of the first cities to actively support a free market economy. Perhaps in part due to the large influx of migrants from “traditional” mountain areas, it has also been plagued by political and property conflicts, new and “resurrected” blood feuds, and a high crime rate. Shkodra has one university, 5 high schools, and approximately 100 middle schools. Bushat (pop. 12,000) is a small town located about 40 minutes by car from the city of Shkodra.

Tirana, the capital (pop. 650,000), is 50 km from the Adriatic Sea, at the foot of the Dajti mountain. Tirana inhabitants are diverse; the population is estimated to have doubled since 1990, when political freedoms catalyzed a large influx of rural migrants. Since the end of the socialist regime, Tirana lost its position as a strong industrial city, although it remains the center of cultural, scientific, and educational activities in Albania, with institutes of higher education, 30 high schools, and 171 middle schools. Kamza is a rural area located near Tirana.
ANNEX II: CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Southeast European Joint History Project

The Southeast European Joint History Project (JHP) was formally initiated the Board of CDSEE in November 1997. It is scheduled to operate between June 1999 and the winter of 2000.

The JHP: Abstract

The initial stage of the JHP is an International Conference on ‘National Memory in Southeastern Europe’, to be held 17-20 June 1999 on the island of Halki, Greece. The conference, organised in association with ELIAMEP (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy), will be overseen by an Academic Committee that is chaired Professor Maria Todorova (author of ‘Imagining the Balkans’, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1997) of the University of Florida.

This conference, with 60 participants, will set the broader conceptual framework and identify specific goals for the series of regional workshops that will form the core of the key second phase of the JHP. These workshops, under the supervision of a Textbook Committee, will examine textbooks and other means of education and communication in the field of history and work towards achieving realistic progress in their revision.

A central element of the JHP is the creation of cross-border networks between historians and other academics in the humanities as well as textbook scholars.

The geographic span of the JHP includes the following thirteen countries:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

CONTEXT

History is at the centre of the process legitimising and reproducing political and social relations in Southeast Europe, perhaps to an extent with few parallels in contemporary civic societies. It is thus necessary to promote an intimate knowledge and a comparative perspective of its past. Successful initiatives among European states with long-standing ‘national-feuds’, (such as the Braunschweig textbook project), will serve as a valuable precedent to this effort which stresses the need to challenge certain ethnic/national ‘historical truths’.

The Southeast European Joint History Project aims at a long-term, sustained effort to introduce subtle, gradual, but profound change on the level of difference-producing elites, such as academics and educators.

PHASE I:

The Halki Conference

The conference will centre on the cultural aspects of nationalism, both as secular religion and
cultural construction (of languages, literature, etc.). Considering collective memory the “glue” which shapes the “imagined community” of the nation, national memory is the focus of attention.

The conference is conceived around three main themes:

a). The production of national memory: hero worship and commemorations;

b). The application of national memory: ethnic, national, and other social identities;

c). The transmission of national memory (focusing on education and, specifically, textbooks).

In addition to analysing the different facets of national/ethnic identity, with particular attention to the concrete techniques of this process, the conference will consider practical approaches of how to regulate and moderate its most extreme manifestations. It will highlight areas where curricula revision is both required and realisable.

More than 40 leading historians and textbook scholars have already agreed to participate and have submitted full paper abstracts. The majority of paper proposals directly deal with the re-writing and re-creating of history that has occurred in Southeast Europe (through textbooks and other means) in the course of the 1980 and ‘90s.

**PHASE II:**

**Network of Southeast European Historians**

A seven-person Academic Committee of leading history scholars will supervise and evaluate part of the project. They are: Fikret Adanir, Halil Berktay, Slobodan Curcic, Karl Kaser, Paschalis Kitromilides, John Koliopoloulos and Maria Todorova.

A central responsibility of the body will be to seek applicants and select for approval proposals for academic contacts between participating institutions. They will establish an academic network among institutions in thirteen Southeast European states as a counterweight to existing groups of nationalist ideology and state interest. The projected activities are in the following directions: guest lectures; visiting professorships; exchange visits and exchange of university curricula; and the enrichment of the existing network of summer schools.

They will also oversee selection and publication of the Conference’s proceedings.

**Textbook Workshops**

Pursuing the recommendations of the Halki conference, seven workshops are planned to directly address the more practical and immediate problems of history and (to a lesser degree) religious instruction in secondary (and other) schools. The following, provisional, line-up of conflict-producing areas is being considered (with probable venues – to be finalised – in parentheses):

Albania – FYROM – Yugoslavia – Greece (Skopje)
Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia – FYROM – Slovenia – Yugoslavia (Tuzla)
Bulgaria – FYROM – Greece – Yugoslavia (Sofia)
Cyprus – Greece – Turkey (Nicosia)
Croatia – Romania – Hungary – Moldova – Yugoslavia (Cluj)
Turkey – Albania – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Bulgaria – FYROM – Greece – Yugoslavia (Izmir)
Religious education in the Balkans (Thessaloniki)

It is proposed that each workshop be attended by around ten to twelve textbook experts, with the participation, where fitting, of historians, Ministry of Education personnel, publishers, media representatives and others. These workshops will take place beginning September 1999 and end not later than December 2000. They will be assisted and tracked throughout by the Textbook Committee, whose multi-national composition is presently being finalised.

Participants will deal as appropriate with specific epochs covered in textbooks, covering the ancient, medieval, Ottoman and nation-states periods as well as with religious texts where relevant.

Also, while recognising the improved standard of textbooks in some countries within the region the Textbook Committee will examine the role of teaching methods that in many cases still allows for the transmission of aggressive nationalism and other negative features.

THE BALKAN SCHOOL, SOFIA

The Balkan School, now in its second year of operation, represents a unique educational endeavour: students (between the ages of 14 and 19) are taught two Balkan languages and two other European languages other than their own. In history classes, texts other than the standard Bulgarian textbooks are to be employed.

CDSEE wishes to encourage the Balkan School in pursuing its distinct multi-cultural approach. CDSEE intends to assist the School produce a textbook on the History of the Balkan Peoples in Bulgarian, which will be translated into English and submitted to the Academic Committee for critical comment.

BACKGROUND TO THE JHP

Formal preparatory work on the JHP began in November 1997. The project plan is the product of extensive research and consultation with historians, textbook scholars, teachers, government officials, publishers and others.

CDSEE's adoption of the JHP was a follow-up to the June 1997 International Conference in Thessaloniki on Culture and Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe, that was organised by the Association for Democracy in the Balkans, CDSEE's Greek-partner organisation.

There, the place of history and textbooks in the region was addressed in detail at a key session entitled The Potential Role if Education in Reconciliation. Papers were delivered by recognised leaders in the field such as Wolfgang Hoepken of Leipzig University (and formerly of the Georg-Eckert Institute); Maria Todorova of the University of Florida, Hercules Millas and Evangelos Kofos from Athens; and Busra Ersanli of Marmara University, Istanbul.

CDSEE strives to co-ordinate with all relevant individuals and organisations involved in this specialist field in order to avoid duplication of international efforts and to facilitate meaningful results. Aside from the historians and textbook specialists who have already confirmed their intention to attend, the CDSEE is inviting representatives of relevant organisations to take part in the conference on Halki.

Following the mid-1998 publication of 'The Image of the Other – An Analysis of High-School
Textbooks in History from the Balkan Countries” by the Balkan College Foundation, Sofia, CDSEE has entered into a working relationship with the mould-breaking Balkan School and assisting with the production of new textbooks.

CDSEE remains interested to hear from any individuals or bodies that believe they can further strengthen the JHP and its aims.

**FUNDING**

CDSEE is already in possession of some funding for the JHP. It has submitted the proposal to the European Union (the Royaumont Process), the National Endowment for Democracy and other agencies for financial support.

CDSEE acknowledges the backing provided by the European Union in the “Recommendations of the Presidency Conference on Southeast Europe: European Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy” held in Graz, Austria, 14-16 November 1998, that, “endorse[d] strongly existing concrete proposals like the Joint History Project”.

CDSEE welcomes further financial support to the Southeast Europe Joint History Project.

**PARTNERSHIPS**

CDSEE is working in partnership with the Balkan School in Sofia.

The Georg-Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany, is collaborating closely on the JHP.

The Halki Conference is being organised in association with ELLAMEP, that has a long record of successful annual seminars on the Island.

CDSEE is interested to work in co-ordination with all relevant organisations in the field of Balkan studies and in the textbook arena, like AIESEE (Association Internationale des Etudes Sud-Est Europeen) the national institutes for Balkan studies etc.

For further information on the JHP, please contact:

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