

# DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVENIAN EDUCATION POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT AND BEYOND<sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Urška ŠTREMFEJL, <sup>2</sup>Damjan LAJH

<sup>1</sup>*Educational Research Institute*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Ljubljana, SLOVENIA*

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**Abstract.** Nowadays lifelong learning is widely recognized as a solution in facing the intense new challenges of an increasingly globalized world. In facing these challenges and in order to achieve common educational goals, the nation states are included in different forms of international cooperation. It is very interesting to see how these different forms of international cooperation have impact on different aspects of national education policy and how the idea of lifelong learning has helped countries to increasingly perceive themselves as similar with respect to necessary educational changes. Taking into consideration both inherent perspective (international cooperation influence and national responses to it), first of all it is essential to understand nation state's historical legacies, the history of its policy paradigms and the history of its policy-making in the education field. From that point of view, on the one hand, the article explores the development of Slovenian education policy from its early beginning (the Reformation) till today. On the other hand, it focuses

on the impact of different forms of international cooperation on the national education policy. On the basis of analysis of formal and informal documents and conducted semi-structured interviews, the article concludes that although Slovenia is included in various different forms of international cooperation, their influence on Slovenian education policy is limited. However, this cannot be solely attributed to education as a sensitive policy area with a low level of implementation imperative, where cooperation is in most cases voluntary, but also to the trends in Slovenian history.

*Keywords:* education policy, international cooperation, lifelong learning, Slovenia

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## **Introduction**

Slovenia's education policy has been shaped by its different administrative systems. 1991 marked a turning point in the development of the current education system when the Republic of Slovenia gained its independence. In its efforts to set up a high quality education system which would enable the maximum number of its citizens not only to exercise their rights to education, but also to achieve their desired occupation, Slovenia introduced new legislation to regulate the entire education system from pre-school to university education (1993–1996). From this point onwards, the legislation regulating the management, organisation and financing of education has undergone many changes. These changes relate to specific issues and have to some extent been guided by Slovenia's membership of the European Union (EU) as well as its membership of and cooperation with various international organisations.

The main aim of this article is to present the origin and the development of Slovenia's education policy, with a special emphasis on Slovenia's cooperation and coordination of its various activities in the context of Europe and the wider world. To understand the changing policy in the field of educa-

tion in Slovenia, it is essential to understand its historical legacies, the history of its policy paradigms and the history of its policy-making. In this respect, the article will analyse the historical development of Slovenia's education system, as well as the legislative milestones and its internationalisation and, specifically, the Europeanization.

This article is based on an analysis of Slovenian legislation and other official documents regulating education policy, especially in an international context (e.g. the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning, National Reports on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme); official EU documentation in the field of education policy (e.g., Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training); data concerning Slovenia's international cooperation in the field of education policy, accessed on the web page of the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport; and interviews conducted with relevant officials from the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport (at the Education Development Office and EU Department) during the period from 2008 to 2010.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section presents the milestones in the development of education policy that took place on the territory of present-day Slovenia, from the Reformation in the second half of the sixteenth century to the present day. The second and third sections explore the development of Slovenia's education policy in both the international and EU contexts. Finally, the fourth section synthesises the main findings.

### **Three periods in the development of education policy within the borders of present-day Slovenia**

The education policy on the territory of present-day Slovenia has a long history. Its development has been shaped by three key periods. The first period includes the developments that took place within the different administrative systems prior to the Second World War. This period was marked by

different interventions and enforced rules, which we may call an *imperialistic education policy*. The second period was the development of education within socialist Yugoslavia, from the end of the Second World War until Slovenia's independence in 1991. During this period, Slovenia, as one of the socialist republics of Yugoslavia, (partially) developed its own education policy, whilst at the same time keeping its policy consistent with the common federal arrangement. Therefore, in this period we can talk of a *supervised education policy*. The third period is the development of education policy in an independent Slovenia from 1991 onwards. This period can be considered the beginning of a Slovenian *sovereign education policy*. In all three periods, we can observe different developments that took place across the entire education system, extending from pre-school up to university education. The key influences that impacted on the entire education system are presented below, whilst the milestones in each specific level of education are illustrated in the Table 1.

*The development of Slovenia's education policy within the different administrative systems prior to the WWII: imperialistic education policy*

The first idea for a nation-wide school system taught in the Slovenian language to raise general literacy rates dates back to the Reformation (1550) when the first books in the Slovenian language were published. Soon after the era of Slovenia's cultural-linguistic awakening, the influence of the Counter-Reformation (and, within it, Jesuit education) suppressed almost all the Reformation ideas. Although Jesuit schools were restricted only to men, and although the educational content concentrated on religious themes, and the Slovenian language was absent from the classroom, the Jesuit school system can be regarded as the first (incomplete) education system in Slovenia. During this period, the first high school lessons were recognised in Ljubljana (Gabrič, 2009).

The first real education system which covered all stages of school edu-

cation (from pre-school to higher education) was introduced by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In 1770, Empress Maria Theresa announced that education was a political issue and therefore justified the state's intervention in the school system. Her reforms stressed that "The education of young people is the most important basis for the prosperity of the nation." In accordance with this idea, the Austrian General School Ordinance in 1774 introduced partial compulsory schooling for the first time with the aim of encouraging economic development and of raising employment in manufacturing sector. The reform was not as successful as expected, nevertheless, it drastically increased the level of national literacy.<sup>2)</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century (1809-1813), when the western part of present-day Slovenia became an administrative part of France, the school system of Napoleon's Illyrian Provinces improved the position of the Slovenian language in schools. This fact meant that every third child went to school, which was a drastic increase in comparison to the Austro-Hungarian system. During this period, the idea of building French university in Ljubljana became visible (Gabrič, 2009).

With the return of Austrian supremacy in 1848, the first Ministry for Education was established in Vienna. The main subject in schools reverted to religion and Latin. The general examination, introduced as the final examination in grammar school, was an entrance requirement for university. Revolutionary movements in Ljubljana in 1848 revived the demand for the foundation of a Slovenian university. In 1870, the first school for educating teachers was introduced, although female teachers received only 80 % of the salary of male teachers and they were forbidden to marry.

Following the defeat of the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy (which had regulated the school system until the First World War) and the creation of the new independent state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), German ceased to be the language of instruction.

The education system in the first Yugoslavia was harmonised through a set of common curricular guidelines and assessment criteria.<sup>2)</sup> However, the new reforms did not represent a real turning point in the already well-developed Slovenian school system. There were also tensions for a common Serbo-Croatian language. Following the First World War, Slovenia lost a part of its territory to Italy and Austria, and the Italian and Austrian authorities in those regions closed down many Slovenian school institutions and opened new institutions in which education in the Slovenian language was virtually abolished.<sup>2)</sup> After years of struggle for the recognition of the Slovenian language and a national consciousness, the University of Ljubljana was founded in July 1919. From 1921 onward, eight adult education institutions (*ljudske univerze, ljudska vseučilišča* or folk high schools) were established in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, influenced mainly by the Anglo-American and German traditions.<sup>3)</sup>

*The development of Slovenia's education policy within a socialist Yugoslavia: supervised education policy*

With the establishment of a communist system after the WWII, the view on the role of schools and the importance of the education system drastically changed. Every aspect of education was subjected to the needs of the economy. In the early 1950s, the rapid economic development and reconstruction of Slovenia required widely available educational programmes to improve the level of general education and to provide vocational qualifications. Due to the increasing number of employed women, the number of pre-school institutions continued to grow. The reform of 1958 introduced a system of secondary schools based on the compulsory eight-year basic school. Finally, with the reform of the education system in 1981, a new concept was introduced. With the so-called career-oriented education, only programmes that prepared students equally for entering the labour market and for university

studies were introduced, while grammar schools as preparatory schools only for academic studies were abolished. The experiment to connect work and education together brought education into a functional dependency on the current needs of labour and, as such, substantially curtailed the possibilities of academic learning. In the field of tertiary education, after 1945, the focus shifted from universities to individual higher education institutions. The legislation of 1954 defined a university as a group of faculties, each of which became an independent institution. In 1989, an amendment to the Career-Oriented Education Act specified the autonomous and integrative role of universities in the forming of study programmes and research activities, and laid the foundations for the reform of higher education in the soon-to-be independent Republic of Slovenia.<sup>2)</sup> In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Slovenia acquired the right to develop its own national education system, while the former Yugoslav education authorities tried to unify the education system by means of political action.<sup>2)</sup>

From this overview of the development of Slovenia's education system from the Reformation until Slovenia's independence, we can observe that Slovenian education developed within the framework of several education systems. Slovenian education often struggled to survive in environments that were not in the least favourable. It survived both linguistic and social struggles against the pressures of its more powerful and wealthier neighbours, as well as ideological indoctrination and post-war experimentation.<sup>3)</sup> In the interweaving of various cultural, linguistic, educational and conceptual influences, Slovenian education can be given credit for consolidating its survival and becoming a sovereign, well-developed and internationally comparable education system.

*The development of education policy in an independent Slovenia: sovereign education policy*

The 1990s represented a turning point in the further development of the education system in the Republic of Slovenia. In its efforts to set up a high quality education system, Slovenia introduced new legislation to regulate the entire education system from pre-school to university education (1993–1996). The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (1995) led to the passing of the Organisation and Financing Education Act, and a further five education-related acts. At the same time, the development of education policy has since become closely connected and intertwined with various international and specifically EU programmes and actions.

Since 1993, pre-school education has been an integral part of the educational system and has fallen under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.<sup>2)</sup> In 1996, extensive systemic changes were introduced by the new legislation;<sup>2)</sup> these systemic changes were followed by substantive changes to the curriculum (1999/2000), prepared by the Curriculum Commission for Preschool Institutions. The right to choose between public and private schools or home schooling is part of pupils' rights and duties, which are also stressed in The Basic School Act (1996; last revision 2007) which regulates basic education. Together with the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (1996, last revision 2008), it regulates the basic management and organisational principles, and divides the responsibilities and autonomy between the state, the municipalities and the schools.<sup>2)</sup> In the field of secondary education, the grammar school programme was reintroduced in 1990. In 1991, short vocational education programmes were restructured into two or three year vocational programmes and four-year technical education. Upper secondary education in the Republic of Slovenia was split into general and vocational and technical upper secondary education. In the field of tertiary education, the Higher Education Act established new regulations in 1993. The



Act clearly defines the autonomy of universities and allows for the establishment of private single higher education institutions. The Higher Education Master Plan sets out the public service role to be played by higher education. Finally, Slovenian independence in 1991 has also had an important impact in the field of adult education. Adult education was conceptualised in the White Paper on Education (1996) as being an equal field within the system of education. There have also been some important changes both in the field of public administration (the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports established an Adult Education Department), and in the field of financing it (the Government of the Republic of Slovenia has, in its budget, earmarked specific financial resources for the development of adult education).

As already mentioned, following its independence, Slovenia began actively to participate in international actions. In its search for a means of developing its own education system, it was receptive to new ideas and best practices from other countries.

**Table 1.** Milestones in the education policy within the borders of present-day Slovenia

<b>Level Period</b>	<b>Pre-school education</b>	<b>Primary school educa- tion</b>	<b>Upper sec- ondary edu- cation</b>	<b>Tertiary education</b>	<b>Adult educa- tion</b>
<b>Imperialistic education policy (until WWII)</b>	1756 – first pre-school  After WWI – Slovenian pre- schools in the Austrian and Italian territo- ry were closed	1774 – com- pulsory schooling  First Yugo- slavia – common curricula guidelines	1850 – intro- duction of general exam- ination	1919 – The University of Ljubljana was founded	1774 – Sunday schools for farmers  1921 – estab- lishment of first folk high schools
<b>Supervised education policy (from WWII to 1991)</b>	Growth of pre-schools  Compulsory preschools from the age of 6	8 year single structure compulsory education	1981 – Ca- reer-oriented Education Act	1954 – Facul- ties become independent institutions	Rapid growth in the needs for labour (voca- tional qualifica- tions)
<b>Sovereign education</b>	System (pub- lic-private)	Pupils’ rights and duties are	Division between	The autonomy of universities	Equal field of education (es-

<b>policy (post-1991)</b>	and substantive changes	defined, financing is divided between national and local level	general and vocational education, substantive changes	Public/private	establishing of a special sector, a separate item in budget)
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### **Slovenian education policy in the international context**

Slovenia's international cooperation in the field of education currently includes bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation at all levels, from pre-school to higher education. During the last decade, Slovenia's international cooperation in the field of education primarily concerned with its accession to the EU, its cooperation with the Council of Europe, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and its efforts to gain admission to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Slovenia also cooperates with third countries, especially the countries of South-East Europe (Table 2).

**Table 2.** International cooperation in the field of Slovenian education policy

<b>Bilateral</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Multilateral</b>
Cooperation with neighbouring countries	Alps-Adriatic Working Community	UNESCO
Minorities in Italia, Hungary	Central European Initiative	OECD
50 bilateral agreements with the EU and other countries	Mediterranean countries	COUNCIL OF EUROPE
30 Programmes and Protocols with the EU and other countries		EU

## **Overview of international cooperation in the field of Slovenian education policy**

In the field of bilateral cooperation, Slovenia has placed special significance on cooperation with the neighbouring countries and on the education of "Slovenes abroad". Since 1992, more than 50 international bilateral agreements have been signed by Slovenia on education, culture and science, as well as more than 30 programmes and some protocols. These documents pave the way for an easier and more efficient co-operation between Slovenia and the greater part of Europe and some non-European countries. In particular, the direct links and exchanges between secondary school students, university students, teachers, professors, and experts have all been encouraged.<sup>2)</sup>

At the regional level, which is becoming an indispensable and complementary part of bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation, school links and exchanges should be stressed, in particular CEEPUS, a successful Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies, promoting academic mobility, which Slovenia joined at its very inception (1995). Slovenia was an active participant in the Tempus programmes I, II, and III before being granted the status of an EU candidate country. Slovenia is also active in the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, in particular in the Task Force Education and Youth - Enhanced Graz Process. Combining its experience in educational reform and its knowledge of the region, Slovenia is able to provide reform assistance to other national school systems for the purposes of establishing stability and democracy. Regional cooperation has also been successful within the framework of the Central-European Alpe-Adria initiative; today it is implemented within the framework of the so-called "Strategic Partnership" (co-operation between Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia).

Turning now to multilateral cooperation<sup>4)</sup> Slovenia became the 165<sup>th</sup> UNESCO member in 1992. UNESCO programmes have a broader, more

basic and global scope, which provide lifelong learning and "education for all."<sup>5)</sup> In Slovenia, the UNESCO national commission is seated at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

Slovenia formally applied for OECD membership in 1996.<sup>2)</sup> In the field of education, Slovenia began cooperation with the OECD's systematic review of Slovenian education policy in 1998, which was carried out at the request of the Slovenian government. The report was prepared by a review team composed of internationally mixed members, while its conclusions and recommendations were discussed at a special session of the OECD Education Committee, convened in October 1998 in Ljubljana.<sup>6)</sup> In 2001, the Ministry of Education and Sport finally gained observer status on the Committee for Education.

Slovenia signed the European Cultural Convention even before it had become a full member of the Council of Europe, which has two committees responsible for education: the Steering Committee for Education and the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research. By acceding to the European Cultural Convention in 1992, Slovenia was given the possibility of participating in the programme of the Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe, government committees, conferences, symposia, workshops and projects. By acceding to these various conventions,<sup>7)</sup> Slovenia undertook the obligation to incorporate the principles and stipulations of those conventions into its national laws and to practically implement those.

All of the disclosed origins and forms of multilateral international cooperation/coordination in the field of Slovenia's education policy can also be summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Milestones in multilateral international cooperation/coordination in the field of Slovenia's education policy

	<b>Origin of cooperation</b>	<b>Form of cooperation</b>
<b>UNESCO</b>	1992 – Membership in UNESCO	Intergovernmental policy cooperation; the main activity being the programme “Education for All”; project cooperation i.e. Lifelong Learning, Improving Education Quality, and Promoting Rights and Freedoms.
<b>OECD</b>	1998 – Review of Slovenian education policy	Intergovernmental policy cooperation; a qualitative and quantitative analysis of education systems, based on a common methodology, statistical data and indicators.
<b>Council of Europe</b>	1992 – European Cultural Convention	Intergovernmental policy cooperation; the adoption of various conventions; project cooperation on The Education of Roma/Gypsy Children in Europe, The Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, History Teaching, Intercultural Education, and Language Policy.
<b>EU</b>	1998 – European educational and training projects	Transgovernmental policy coordination within the EU (including the European Economic Area and EU candidate states); the main activity being the “Working Programme Education & Training 2010”; Open Method of Coordination.

**Table 4.** Slovenia's participation in international comparative educational studies and assessments

Study / assessment	International coordinating centre	Year /cycle of Slovenia's participation	Measure / test
Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)	OECD	2006, 2009, 2012	literacy in three competence fields: reading, mathematics, science
Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)	OECD	2008	learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools
Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS and <i>TIMSS Advanced</i> )	IEA	2003, 2007, 2008, 2011	trends in student achievement in mathematics and science
Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS)	IEA	2001, 2006	trends in children's reading literacy achievement and policy and practices related to literacy
Second Information Technology in Education Study (SITES)	IEA	2006	pedagogy and ICT use in schools, the role of ICT in teaching and learning in mathematics and science classrooms
International Civic and Citizenship Edu-	IEA	1999, 2009	the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their

Education Study (ICCS)			roles as citizens
European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC)	EC	2011	the language proficiency of students

As can be seen from Table 4 beside already presented different forms of multilateral cooperation, important international dimension of Slovenian education policy presents also international comparative educational studies and assessments<sup>8)</sup> in which Slovenia has been participating continually for the last two decades.

### **The legislative background to international cooperation**

The basic outlines of Slovenia's international cooperation on educational matters are laid down in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia. The White Paper led to the establishment of a legislative framework for change which defines the basic aspects of the international dimension. The *Organisation and Financing of Education Act* states that participation in European integration processes is one of the basic goals of the Slovenia's education system and one of the priorities of its further development.<sup>2)</sup> The *Basic School Act* defines the goals of basic education and including the following: the international comparability of achievement standards; the acquisition of knowledge for further education; learning about foreign cultures; learning foreign languages; teaching general cultural values and civilisations stemming from the European tradition; education to promote mutual tolerance, respect for being different, co-operation with others, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and, consequently, developing the ability to live in a democratic society. The *Grammar School Act* states that one of the fundamental tasks of grammar schools is to provide an internationally comparable level of knowledge that is required for the continuation of studies in higher education. One of the most important goals of the reform period 1996–

2001 was achieving the comparability and greater compatibility of vocational education and training and qualifications with other European systems. The *Vocational and Technical Education Act* provides a basis for the systematic promotion of international activity in vocational education, since it defines internationalisation as the basic criterion for quality management and successfully competitive education and training systems. International cooperation is an obligatory component in planning the school system from the point of view of its contents, organisation, financing and personnel. The *Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act* and the *Amendments to the Higher Education Act* (2004 and 2006 amendments) introduced all the elements of the Bologna reforms of tertiary education: the tertiary structure, the diploma supplement, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and quality assurance.<sup>2)</sup>

Bilateral cooperation between Slovenia and European and non-European countries is defined in bilateral agreements, and in programmes and protocols on the cooperation in education, science and culture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the primary actor in concluding international agreements, including those concerning education, culture and science. The Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology all cooperate in shaping the contents and the types of cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducts the entire process, from the initiative and its ratification in the National Assembly, to the publication of the agreement in the Official Journal and its implementation.

### **Slovenian education policy in the EU context**

Education in the EU context is an area of policy in which the harmonisation of national laws and regulations with EU legislation is not required. The EU's aim in education is primarily to contribute to the development of high quality education by encouraging cooperation between member states

and by supporting and complementing their actions, whilst fully respecting the responsibility of member states to create their own curriculum content and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, at the EU level we are able to find many decisions, resolutions and declarations referring to education, including, for example, equal opportunities for all, efficiency at school, mobility in higher education, foreign language education, safety at school, lifelong learning, academic and vocational certification, the quality of education, educational statistics, the development of general and vocational training, education and the possibilities of employment etc. All these activities in the EU context enjoy common (voluntary-based) cooperation among member states.

In the field of education, the foundations for cooperation between the EU member states have been laid down through the open method of coordination (OMC). These include: diversified working groups which bring together national experts and the partners concerned; the sharing of practices and experiences regarding common objectives adopted by ministers; defining indicators for monitoring progress; and producing European references for supporting national reforms. By introducing the OMC, the Lisbon Strategy established a common European education space in which (hitherto completely heterogeneous) education systems could connect to create a uniform core of lifelong learning.<sup>9)</sup> The Lisbon process and the introduction of the OMC formed the basis for installing the education sector in the broader EU context and for legitimising it as a subject of European integration (Gornitzka, 2006). In this respect, the OMC represents a milestone in European education policy since it has arguably increased and strengthened the education sector at the EU level, whilst opening it up to influences from other fields (economic and social policy).<sup>10)</sup> The core of the OMC process in the field of education is the Working Programme of Education and Training 2010<sup>11)</sup> (Lange & Alexiadou, 2007).



The preparation for Slovenia's participation in the European education and training programmes began in 1998 when Slovenia began including its pre-school institutions, schools, adult education organisations, firms, universities, independent higher education institutions, and other educational organisations in European educational and training projects. In October 2002, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia passed a resolution to form the EU Programmes Agency, thus giving the green light for the foundation of CME-PIUS – the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes.<sup>2)</sup> In 2004, Slovenia became a full member of the EU and has since then been integrated into all forms of (voluntary-based) international cooperation as well as coordination on the individual, institutional and governmental levels.<sup>2)</sup> .

### **Slovenian experiences with the open method of coordination**

Among the OMC's influences on the EU member states which were identified by various authors, two in particular were highlighted by Chalmers & Lodge:<sup>12)</sup> changes in the behaviour of member states' officials and their readiness to gain comparative country information to learn best practice in order to adapt their current policy. The desire to achieve positive results has led to a situation in which the OMC is unintentionally forcing governments to listen to new approaches and consider new instruments which may not best fit. The desire to achieve positive results presupposes the development of capacities and means that are useful for achieving goals.<sup>13)</sup>

In Slovenia's case, the policy process in the field of education has not changed as a result of the OMC's influence. OMC activities supplement the principal reform process and do not affect any deep systemic change (Lajh & Štremfel, 2010). In this way, the Strategy of Lifelong Learning in Slovenia emerged primarily within the framework of the Ministry of Education and Sport. Therefore, its main focus has been on those solutions and measures

directly relevant to the Education and Training 2010 programme. By contrast, other fields, such as the economy, have more actively embraced the various emerging OMC proposals; whereas education policymakers seem to find it difficult to accept that the issue of lifelong learning also demands an integral inter-sectoral approach. To this extent, the coordination of Education and Training does not realise its potential, as for it fails to take advantage of European procedures to increase its influence by attracting the attention of political leaders to their priorities and projects.<sup>14)</sup>

National actors periodically monitor their country's progress and produce regular reports within set timeframes. The reports provide feedback information on the European educational process. By establishing a system of reporting, national administrators guarantee a measure of support for the Education and Training 2010 programme. Here, a special role is played by the composition of the national group that prepares the report. In Slovenia, a national group is mostly made up of governmental representatives.<sup>15)</sup> Although this group generally does not include representatives of non-governmental organisations or social partners, Slovenian representatives claim that objectivity is ensured by the publication of the reports. The problem, however, is that many countries do not discuss the results and comparisons arising from the Progress Reports since the reports never reach all stakeholders at the national level. Further, not all the relevant actors are included in the process of collecting and preparing the data. This is also the reason why it is not possible to complete an evaluation (Munkholm & Olsen, 2009).

Slovenian representatives are not actively included in all clusters<sup>16)</sup> at the EU level. In the case of Slovenia, the lack of direct inclusion in clusters and cooperation at the EU level is justified on the following grounds: "We are not actively participating in the key competences cluster, but we do take into consideration the available results of the cluster's work in policy formulation and make use of them in the implementation of measures,"<sup>17)</sup> Lange & Alexi-

adou (2007) have measured the influence of respective member states on the European education policy based on a number of key activities concerning lifelong learning. Member states may monitor results but simultaneously fail to attend the cluster meetings, possibly indicating their passive adoption of EU policies.

Another particularly important aspect of the OMC is whether new knowledge gained at an EU level is appropriately distributed among the different stakeholders, and, if so, who should be nominated to join the expert groups at the EU level. In the field of education in Slovenia, it is recommended that governments nominate their highest professional authorities for specialised networks at the EU level. Their influence on the European network generally depends on their ability to demonstrate a high level of knowledge in the sphere of their activity and competence. Another interesting question is whether Slovenian representatives in their respective clusters are active enough – there is no supervision when just one representative from Slovenia participates in an individual cluster (Lajh & Štremfel, 2010).

Although Slovenia achieves EU-comparable and even above-average results in many fields, it is noticeably passive when it comes to exporting its own knowledge. In the future, Slovenia should devote more time to organising activities of mutual learning. EU member states that achieve especially positive results in various indicators become so-called “exporters of knowledge” and good practices, and other member states are always interested in their lessons. In this respect, Slovenia could strengthen its position and its reputation within the EU policy arena and, in accordance with the theoretical presumptions, it could reorient its role of mutual policy learning towards “forced” policy learning or “exporting knowledge” (Lange & Alexiadou, 2007).

All in all, education policy in Slovenia is still developing too independently, with insufficient support from other sectors and an insignificant

connection to other sectors. As a result, the OMC is not as open as it could be and it does not include as broad a range of actors as should be the case. Cooperation between actors could enable not only “policy lessons” from other states, but also “learning about the OMC” between actors and sectors within Slovenia. Slovenia should in the future develop the means to stimulate and strengthen the inclusion of social partners, civil society and local communities, since their role in the planning and implementation of the Strategy of Lifelong Learning remains passive.

### **Conclusions**

To understand the development of Slovenia’s culture and education system, from its beginnings to the present day, it is necessary to note that, up until Slovenia’s independence, Slovenian education developed within the framework of several education systems. The 1990s represented a turning point in the development of today’s education system in the Republic of Slovenia, when the conceptual and legislative changes took place. These processes provided the basis for some strategic shifts in the philosophy of international cooperation, which has been marked by a shift from individual to inter-institutional cooperation, and from bilateral to multilateral cooperation within the EU and the wider world. This shift has begun to dissolve the national borders in education and has helped to build a new “international educational area”, which, however, must not gravitate towards harmonisation or standardisation (as has traditionally been the trend in Slovenian history), but must follow the synergetic lines from the bottom up, which means that comparability rests primarily on the quality of the cooperation.

The concept of lifelong learning is a new form of cooperation, and is one of the key areas on which comparability within the EU is built and which therefore changes and enriches the development of national education policies (Papadakis, 2009). Lifelong learning, with its emphasis on learning “from the

cradle to the grave” according to global challenges, has raised the importance of adult education in Slovenia and across the EU. With the Lisbon Strategy and the Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training 2010, a new form of coordination has been established. The OMC not only gives member states the opportunity to improve their education policy, it also establishes new relationships between the relevant stakeholders at both the national and the EU level. Due to the methodological obstacles to measuring the influence of the OMC, it is difficult to determine whether the greater exploitation of its potential would lead to better (i.e. more democratic) governance. As our analysis shows, the OMC’s potential in Slovenia could be better exploited. Representatives of the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport believe that deeper (more obligatory) cooperation, especially expressed in higher level of implementation imperative, in the field of European education for Slovenia is unacceptable. Therefore, in the Slovenian context, it is necessary to promote the positive elements of the OMC and raise awareness of its potential. Accordingly, “learning about the OMC” is crucial for all relevant policy actors in Slovenia.

If we take the above observations into account, we can say that Slovenia’s educational policy is developing in an international environment with a high-degree of decision-making consensus. The primary reason for this is that education is a sensitive policy area, where decisions need to be taken unanimously. In the international policymaking environment, we can identify two levels of institutionalised policy cooperation. On the one hand, we can observe a low degree of institutionalisation in the cooperation frameworks of the international organisations— namely, the Council of Europe, the OECD and UNESCO. Agreements on common policy goals exist within each of these organisations, although these agreements are not enforced through (strong) multilateral surveillance. The OECD, for instance represents a forum where governments, business, civil society and academia can share best practices and

learn from one another, a forum which offers statistics and indicators and which provides a strong evidence base for international comparisons. There are, however, no sanctions for non-compliance. On the other hand, we can observe a high degree of institutionalisation in the EU cooperation framework, in which common policy goals are agreed and implemented under multilateral surveillance with peer reviews, reporting and with mutual monitoring. However, in cases of both high and low degrees of institutionalisation we can observe a low level of implementation imperative, since cooperation on educational matters is always voluntary, and is based on legally non-binding decisions. Since national policy adjustments are not expected to result from Slovenia's international cooperation in extra-EU forums, Slovenia opts for mimicry in the EU context; in other words, Slovenia formally expresses compliance (on paper at least) with common agreed goals, benchmarks and indicators at the EU level, seen as changes in discourse, but no changes in policy content or policy process can be detected. Nevertheless, all forms of policy cooperation have the same aim of improving national education systems and rendering them comparable.

#### NOTES

1. This article originated within the national basic research project "The Open Method of Coordination: an Analysis of Its Policy and Political Consequences" (J5-2030), financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.

2. Eurydice (2009) *Organisation of the Education System in Slovenia 2008/09*.

3. *The Slovenian education system yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007.

4. For comparison of different forms of multilateral cooperation in the education field see also Vongalis-Macrow (2009).

5. The main subject matters are: ensuring the right to and access to education; raising literacy; inclusive education; education for peace and human rights; cultural and language variety in education; new information technologies; the education of teachers; the education for non-violence; education in critical situations and in reconstruction; and health at school.<sup>2)</sup>

6. *Reviews of National Policies for Education – Slovenia*. Paris: OECD, Centre for Cooperation with Non-members, Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Education Committee, 31 May 1999.

7. For example, Slovenia was involved in the drafting of the Lisbon Convention, which it signed in April 1997 together with the other member-states of the Council of Europe and was ratified in 1999.

8. Two main purposes of these studies and assessments are: to provide policymakers and educational practitioners with information about the quality of their education in relation to relevant reference countries, and to assist in understanding the reasons for observed differences among educational systems.

9. [http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2005/papers/wp05\\_16.pdf](http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2005/papers/wp05_16.pdf)

10. [http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2006/papers/wp06\\_16.pdf](http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2006/papers/wp06_16.pdf)

11. In 2009 new Working Programme of Education and Training 2020 was adopted, which follow up the Working Programme of Education and Training 2010.

12. <http://aei.pitt.edu/2848/1/099.pdf>

13. <http://eucenter.wisc.edu/OMC/Papers/Dehousse.pdf>

14. Mandin, C. & Palier, P. L'Europe et les politiques sociales : vers une harmonisation cognitive et normative des réponses nationales. Communication au VIIème congrès de l'AFSP, Lille, 19-20 septembre 2002.

15. Arnejčič, B. (Interview). Ministry of Education and Sport, August 2010, Ljubljana.

16. Clusters represent a form of cooperation at the EU level within the education OMC process in which national delegates/experts, representatives of the European Commission, and other relevant institutions exchange information on different policy options, which can help advance reforms in national education and training systems and, together with other mutual learning activities, form a key part of the

Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Their main working method is the identification and planning of Peer Learning Activities (PLAs).

17. The Slovenian National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Ministry of Education and Sport, 2009.

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✉ Ms. U. Štremfel, research assistant (corresponding author),  
Educational Research Institute,  
Gerbičeva 62  
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
E-Mail: [urska.stremfel@pei.si](mailto:urska.stremfel@pei.si)

Mr. D. Lajh, associate professor  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Ljubljana,  
Kardeljeva ploščad 5  
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
E-Mail: [damjan.lajh@fdv.uni-lj.si](mailto:damjan.lajh@fdv.uni-lj.si)