



New & Old Eastern European Countries Redefining Educational Systems

by *Margarita Sianou*

While social scientists and experts in international affairs are attempting to explain the revolutions in the former eastern bloc countries—revolutions which they did not predict—the entire region is undergoing a transitional period of reform.

During 1989-1991, the unfolding events were revolutionary both in terms of their domestic and international impact and the speed with which changes took place. By 1992, revolution had been replaced by reform, with changes slowed further by the dire economic circumstances present in all the former socialist states.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the recent breakup of Czechoslovakia, the number of countries in the region has more than tripled practically overnight, if one considers time in an historic context, from eight to 27.

The collapse of highly centralized, state-controlled structures, may they be economic, social, or political, is the single most significant development in this region. While the number of countries increased, so did inflation and unemployment.

It is within this context that most nations/states, old and new, are attempt-

International Trends

ing to define and redefine their economic and political structures and institutions.

Educational reforms are part of the on-going changes in recent Eastern European history. Since 1917 in the Soviet Union, and following World War II in the rest of the region, education has been strictly controlled by the state. It was based on a set of common principles believed to define socialist education, i.e., the eradication of illiteracy (primarily a goal of the Soviet Union), massification, inclusion of polytechnic education at the secondary level and a heavy emphasis on ideology.

While these were the organizing principles, Eastern European systems of education did not all share a common historical development, nor were they at the same stage of development at any given time.

As an example, Charles University in Prague and Jagellonian University in Cracow were established in 1348 and 1364, respectively, while the overwhelming majority of tertiary institutions in the Soviet Union came into existence only within the last 50 years. Consequently, education in certain countries will be emi-

nently more reformable than in others, simply because a strong educational infrastructure that existed for centuries will support the current reform movement.

Czechoslovakia as a Case Study

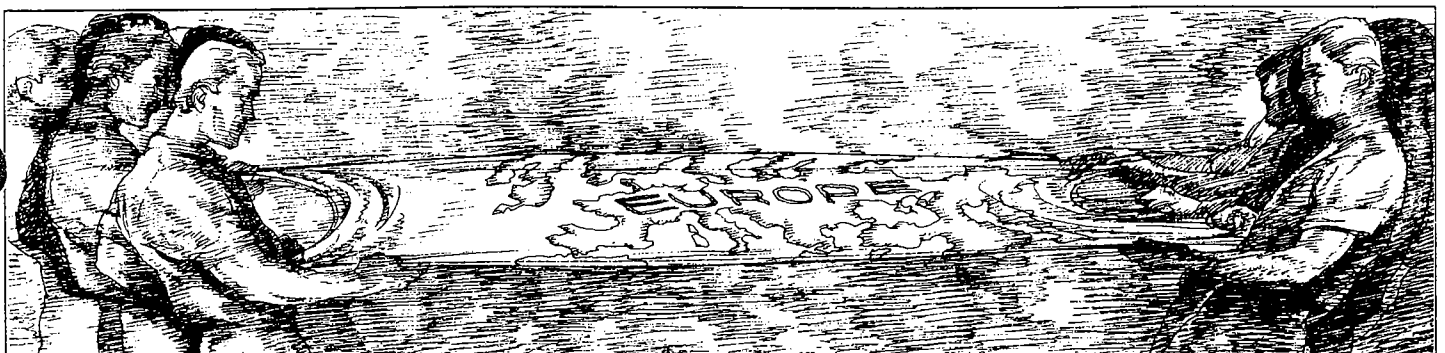
Educational reform in the former Czechoslovakia illustrates the complexity of transition from a system of education based on and supported by a state economy, to one operating within a market economy and western-style democracy.

Structure and Characteristics

Like other eastern European systems of education, the Czechoslovakian system was characterized by its high degree of centralization. Institutions at all levels were directly administered by the Ministry of Education through an elaborate, inflexible schema of centralized bureaucracy and administration.

The absence of institutional autonomy in higher education was what analysts of the system pointed to first. Furthermore, the post-1948 system of higher education was characterized by an imbal-

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PUBLISHER'S LETTER

Remember Africa? Remember the Mideast?

The NAFSA conference in San Francisco concluded with a plenary on Vietnam and Cambodia, both countries new to the international education world. This was a refreshing departure from a scene dominated by Europe, Japan and China and ended the conference on a high note.

The international education field needs to be reminded of the other world out there about which it seems to know less and less. Remember Africa? This continent has been almost absent from the picture. Political upheaval, war, famine, and economic stagnation have seriously weakened Sub-Saharan Africa and, as a result, higher education has been eroded.

The Middle East, once the origin of most foreign students in the U.S., is no longer at the center of our attention. In the meantime, major changes are taking place and universities are increasingly under siege by a generally hostile form of religious fundamentalism.

Still, academics in these regions are struggling against formidable odds to keep their institutions alive and open and to maintain academic standards. What can we do to support their efforts? Without encouragement and assistance from the outside, how long can they keep going?

Our field needs to learn more about the causes of the problems of education in the developing world and find ways of providing assistance. We need to develop a broader vision of international education that includes assistance to the developing world in institution building, and a plan of action to incorporate those concerns into our activities and programs.



Mariam Assefa

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Country Updates

Bahamas

♦ The Commonwealth of the Bahamas has introduced a new examination entitled the Bahamian General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) as of May 1993. This examination has been developed by Bahamians with the full cooperation of the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate/UCLES. The certificates will be issued by the Bahamian Ministry of Education in collaboration with UCLES.

A new feature of this examination is that coursework undertaken during the final year or two of the program will constitute from 20 to 30 percent of candidates' final grades. The assessment of coursework is undertaken by classroom teachers and subsequently moderated by external examiners.

The results of the BGCSE will be reported on a 7-point scale of grades: A, B, C, D, E, F and G, the highest grade being A. The grades of the BGCSE are equivalent to the corresponding grades (A to G) of the UK General Certificate of Secondary Education/GCSE and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education/IGCSE and the former General Certificate of Education O-Level/GCVE O-Level, grades A to E. (The Bahamian Ministry of Education 5/93)

Cameroon

♦ Protesting the introduction of tuition fees of up to 50,000 CFA francs per year (approximately \$180), students burned down the building which housed the faculty of letters and humanities at the University of Yaoundé earlier this year, causing severe damage.

The University was established in 1961 for 7,000 students, each one on scholarship. There are now 42,000 students, including 20,000 on scholarship.

The Minister of Higher Education, Titus Edzoa, had announced that the former scholarship program would be replaced by a system of financial aid available only to outstanding students with demonstrated needs, and to students from an educationally-disadvantaged background. Financial aid also would be reserved for 2nd and 3rd cycle students in disciplines deemed important for the national economy. Foreign students will have to pay fees ranging from \$1,000 to \$13,000.

The minister also announced the creation of four new universities and university institutes with 1,200 places each in Douala, Buea and Dschang, and 450 places in N'Gaoundéré. (*Le Monde de l'Education* 3/93)

Canada

♦ Quebec Education Minister Lucienne Robillard's plans to make college education more responsive to the demands of the marketplace have prompted protests from professors and students.

Colleges in Quebec are known as *collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEPs) (colleges of general and professional training). Quebec is unique in Canada in that it requires all potential university students, apart from mature students, to do two years of qualifying studies at the college level. There are no tuition fees at public CEGEPs.

The principal changes proposed include charging tuition fees for students who fail repeatedly, introducing high school prerequisites in mathematics, physics and second-language courses and cutting one philosophy course (in the English CEGEPs, one humanities course) out of a required four courses in the subject.

The education department estimates that a quarter of Quebec's 148,000 CEGEP students have failed five or more courses. Pre-university CEGEP students would have to pay tuition after failing five courses, while those in the three-year professional stream would pay after failing seven courses. Payment would continue until the student concerned passed four courses. CEGEP administrators are generally in favor of the proposed reforms. (*The Times Higher* 5/7/93)

China

♦ College graduates in 1993 will have more say about their future careers, according to the State Education Commission. The former assignment system will be replaced by a "bilateral" system in which enterprises and institutions will be allowed to pick students they need directly from schools, while students will be given more freedom in selecting employment.

An average 1.5 job opportunities await each student. Most in demand are those who majored in engineering, automation, computer science, architecture, telecommunications, finance and trade, for whom there are an average 10 job offers. Graduates in economic planning, agriculture, literature, history, philosophy and basic sciences will be left out in the cold by employers.

More than 530,000 students will graduate this year from about 1,000 colleges and universities, plus 25,000 postgraduates.

Students who take jobs unrelated to their majors

will have to reimburse their schools for tuition fees, which generally range from \$345 to \$690 for each year of study. (*China Daily* 4/5/93)

◆ Northeast China University, founded in 1923 and once the top school in northeast China, "re-opened" in April in Shenyang.

When the Japanese occupied the area in 1931, the university was closed. In 1949 it reopened as three separate institutions: the Northeast China Engineering Institute, Northeast China Teachers' University and Northeast China Agriculture College.

The Northeast China Engineering Institute was given permission by the State Council in March to resume the title of Northeast China University. It will become a comprehensive university, comprised of an engineering institute, a commercial college, a liberal arts college and a management college. (*China Daily* 4/24/93)

France

◆ Few Western European nations can match France's linguistic diversity—eight distinct languages and more than a dozen dialects—which has been systematically repressed in the name of national unity, until now.

With English galloping across the Continent and the European Community trying to brush away boundaries, the French government has reversed 400 years of official repression of its regional languages.

Under an ambitious plan announced in January, the Government has told state schools and teachers in regions with indigenous tongues to start preparing for bilingual education. It also told local governments to set up councils to promote regional language and culture through publications, theater, music and film.

In the heart of Provence, children are being taught in their native Provençal, a language first carried across the Continent by the troubadours of the Middle Ages. In the foothills of the Pyrenees, a state-owned radio station is broadcasting children's stories in Basque, and in Brittany, work is in progress on dictionaries and plays in Breton, a language of Celts.

The Government, historically impatient with minority cultures, has done a turnabout which strikes many as remarkable. But in its new-found enthusiasm for the local and the colloquial, France is not alone.

Regionalism has become more than a grass-roots movement in the European Community as countries strive to preserve their ethnic identities. Of some 500 million people in Western and Eastern Europe, more than 50 million speak a language other than the official language of their country. Recently, 11 of the 26 member states of the Council of Europe signed a

charter pledging to encourage the use of indigenous languages in schools and public life. (*The New York Times* 5/3/93)

Haiti

◆ The *Ecole Normale Supérieure* at Port-au-Prince was closed in early March for "restructuring." Professors were discharged and the facility was turned over to students of the *Institut Supérieur d'Etudes Propédeutiques* by order of the rector of the State University of Haiti, Gerard Bissainthe, who accused students and faculty of absenteeism.

The faculty had refused to resume teaching in February, asking that the former dean be reinstated. Students are demanding institutional autonomy.

The rector has also refused to validate degrees in medicine of the medical school at Port-au-Prince because of its anarchic and disorderly state. (*Le Monde de l'Education* 4/93)

Hungary

◆ Dual Language Secondary (DLS) grammar schools, offering instruction in both Hungarian and English, are a new development. From among 3,000 high schools, 36 have been given the rank of DLS.

The schools are joint establishments of the British Council, the American Consulate and the Hungarian State. A highly competitive examination is required for entrance.

A typical curriculum in the five-year program would offer Hungarian, English, Russian, and German languages, literature, history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, physical education, music, and art history. Final examinations are bilingual and administered by the Hungarian Ministry of Education.

The diploma awarded is the *Erettsegi Vizsga*. (Correspondence from *Magyar-Angol Tanitási Nyelvi Gimnázium* 4/93)

Italy

◆ Italy has begun to tackle seriously the 70 percent student dropout rate that for decades has wasted public money and spoiled its attempts to democratize higher education.

The introduction last fall of nearly 100 three-year short diplomas (*laurea brevi*) at universities around the country is providing an alternative for students who are unwilling or unable to endure the long and highly theoretical five-year *laurea* programs.

Italian education has been reeling since the 1960s,

Lebanon

when free higher education for all qualified school-leavers became a right. Swelling student numbers were not matched by sufficient funds or staff, resulting in chronic overcrowding, soaring staff/student ratios and poor student support. Only one in four students obtains a degree, and only 10 percent do so in the specified time.

A year ago 430 new diplomas were announced by the higher education ministry which will hugely increase specialist provision. These include courses in agriculture, forestry, food technology, veterinary science, almost all aspects of engineering, biotechnology, pharmacy, journalism, public relations, economics, finance, law, and nursing science, among many others.

The ministry decides the titles of all new diplomas, and discusses proposals from universities with the National University Council. Red tape and a lack of finance reduced the number of new diplomas to just a fraction of the number planned for this academic year. (*The Times Higher* 3/26/93)

♦ A new book soon to be published claims Italy's universities have been designed to benefit academics close to the political establishment rather than hard-pressed students.

Raffaele Simone, professor of linguistics at Rome University, has written *The University of the Three Betrayals*, which he defines as betrayals towards the state, which generously pays people who do little or nothing; towards research, which has become virtually impossible; and towards the students, whose needs are completely ignored.

In no other country, says Simone, are two thirds of the government's ministers also university professors.

"Once a professor is on the payroll he can never be sacked. There is no control over whether a professor teaches or not. Many use the prestige of having 'professor' in front of their names to gild private professions as lawyers, architects or doctors. They may lecture twice a year, if they feel like it. And even if they don't, nobody seems to mind. There is no control or supervision."

Students have to find their way through a nightmare of complexities, bureaucratic labyrinths, organizational quirks and chaos. "Almost nothing is done to inform and guide them. This is one reason why only about 25 percent of those who enroll ever graduate...the students suffer horribly. Nervous breakdowns and all forms of psychiatric illness are common."

Furthermore, universities outside of Rome or Milan, particularly in central and southern Italy, attract few students and fewer teachers because the system of caste and political connections keeps professors at the hub of academic and political power. There is little turnover among the academic establishment and no room for the young, unless they have strong political backing. (*The Times Higher* 3/12/93)

♦ The General Directorate for Technical and Vocational Education has approved a new optics and vision specialization at the *technicien supérieur* (higher technician) level, which is being offered for the first time (1992-93) at the Technical Industrial Institute in Dekwaneh. (*Membernews* F92/W93)

♦ Beirut Arab University is awaiting publication of the official decree establishing the university's new Faculty of General Medicine and Faculty of Dentistry. The decision has been made to use English as the language of instruction in all of the practical faculties, such as architecture, engineering, and pharmacy, in addition to the new medical faculties.

The University is also planning to implement a semester system instead of the current annual system. (*Membernews* F92/W93)

Morocco

♦ *L'Université Al Akhawayn d'Ifrane* (UAI), modeled after American universities, is scheduled to open in September 1993 on a 50-acre campus in Ifrane.

UAI aims to endow students with modern technological knowledge and provide them with ongoing instruction in Arab-Muslim teachings. The language of instruction will be English, but emphasis also will be placed on other modern languages, particularly French and Spanish. UAI hopes to enroll 3,600 students within five years, and will offer bachelor's, master's and PhD programs.

The university will be composed of: the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; graduate schools in social sciences, management, law, and engineering sciences; research centers in Islamic art and culture, strategic studies, demography, environmental medicine, natural resources, information systems, industrial management, and high technology; and a medical school offering specializations in internal medicine, surgery, biology, radiology, and pediatrics.

A faculty of 300 professors and researchers is being recruited. (*Membernews* F92/W93)

♦ Six new private, postsecondary institutions received licensure in 1992, bringing the total to 30. They are: *Institut Supérieur de Commerce International et de Douane*, Casablanca; *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce et des Affaires Maroc*, Casablanca; *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce et d'Informatique*, Casablanca; *Ecole Supérieure d'Informatique et de Gestion*, Rabat; *Ecole Supérieure de Management*, Casablanca; and *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*

continued

