



Podgorica, 25 August 2011

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MONTENEGRO?

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) ask the Ministry of Education and Sports why the pupils of primary schools are not provided with free textbooks, as the Constitution clearly defines ("primary education is free of charge"), while a large number of parents in Montenegro do not have the resources to provide education to their children, although the Constitution obliges them to do so.

In last couple of days, CCE received calls from parents with a request to examine why in Montenegro the books aren't free as in some other countries of the region, noting that they are unable to buy textbooks for their children, whose price for primary school pupils varies from 50 to 90 €. Parents indicate also that if children are not sent to school, they will be held accountable by law.

Specifically, Article 75 of Montenegrin Constitution clearly stipulates that primary education is "compulsory and free." The state of Montenegro is only ensuring the compliance with the provisions of "compulsory" because the Family law imposes the duty of parents. This means that in case of failure to comply with this duty the parents can be held responsible before the competent authority, while the constitutional provision of "free" is practically lost in the application.

Unlike Montenegro, countries in the region are more sensible for their own citizens and respect the constitutional provisions under which primary education is free. For example, **in Serbia, students receive free textbooks in the first three years of primary school**, while some cities intend to do so throughout the entire primary education. **In Bosnia and Herzegovina hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren get textbooks for free through the action of the competent ministry. Slovenia provides free textbooks to students during the entire primary education.** In Belgrade, out of 60,000 respondents-parents 92% of them stated that they want free textbooks. Who is asking parents in Montenegro if they want free books? Who decided that they can financially bear the cost?

A week before the start of the school year, parents are still deliberating on how to equip their pupils. Not once did the Minister of Education explain to the public what to do if you are not able to buy, according to him "the cheapest textbooks in the region," although the state's obligation is to provide to the pupils "free education and under equal rights".



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CCE notes that there are cases where only one parent in the family is employed, while the same family has two or more pupils. The average salary in Montenegro for July amounted up to € 476. Given that parents have to set aside 100 € only for the books for primary school pupils and 123 € for high school pupils, excluding the additional costs of equipping a pupil (buying clothes, school supplies, etc.) it is a clear calculation that one wage is not sufficient to cover needs at the beginning of the school year.

CCE considers that the Parliamentary Committee for Education, Science, Culture and Sport must deal with this issue. Ignoring such issues gives the impression that MPs only agree when it comes to determining the percentage of the money from the budget that will be set aside for political parties, or the receiving's of representatives, who probably have no problem buying books for their children.

Government of Montenegro and its ministries must respect the Constitution. Diverting the public with identity and related issues does not solve the existential problems of the citizens, and it is much more important for citizens with what standard do they enter into any upcoming obligations, due to the fact that most parents are not able to meet the conditions without loans. In this section, CCE urges the Ministry of Education and Sports to provide all students the necessary conditions for education within their own obligations and needs of our citizens.

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