



Centar za građansko obrazovanje
Centre for civic education

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FREE TEXTBOOKS TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS - CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION OF THE STATE

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) condemns the fact that the educational authorities did not provide free textbooks for elementary school pupils for the upcoming 2012/13 school year, even for those in the first three grades.

We remind the public that the CCE raised the issue of allocation of free textbooks to elementary school pupils before the beginning of the last school year 2011/2012, in accordance with the constitutional rights that stipulates: "Primary education is free" (Art.75, Constitution of Montenegro)

Concerning the institutions that CCE addressed, only the **cabinet of Prime Minister Luksic** replied on 30 September 2011 to our letter sent on 5 September 2011 that it "supports and appreciates the initiative..., but that in line with the current financial situation, as well as previous praxis, it seems certain that available resources will be directed only to pupils belonging to the vulnerable groups."

CCE has not received any response neither from the relevant Ministry of Education and Sports nor from the Committee for Education, Science, Culture and Sports and the Committee for Economy, Finance and Budget of the Parliament of Montenegro.

In addition, **parliamentary clubs (DPS, SDP, SNP, PzP, NOVA, BS) who were regularly contacted by letter from 13 September 2011 did not find as necessary to respond to the initiative**, although most of these political parties in their programmes and/or media presentations advocated for better conditions for education, during parliamentary elections in 2009. Only the price of textbooks, without purchasing the additional school materials (notebooks, schoolbags, ...) for elementary school pupils ranges from 48,60 € for the first grade up to € 97.50 for the ninth grade.

Just to remind, in Slovenia, which is an EU member state, pupils from the first to the ninth grade at the beginning of the year, receive free textbooks, and these they return at the end of the year to the school.

In this regard, we could learn a lot from the region, as well. For example, in neighboring Serbia, pupils do not think about the price of textbooks in the first three grades (over 300,000 pupils), since the Ministry of Education delivers these free of charge. In addition, local Belgrade authorities have provided free textbooks for pupils



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of all nine grades. Also, every elementary school pupil in Belgrade, from this school year, gets two sets of textbooks, one for learning at home, another for the school. They are enabled also with lockers in schools, in order to avoid pupils deforming spine while wearing a heavy bag full of textbooks (app. several kilos) on his/her backs every day.

Samples of good practice in establishing equal opportunities in education must be a guide to the Montenegrin educational authorities. That would ensure care about the youngest, who do not fall into the "vulnerable groups", although in the current economic state of affairs it is quite difficult to define who does not really belong to the "vulnerable groups".

Montenegro is defined as a state of social justice, where elementary education is free and compulsory. However, according to the interpretation of the Ministry of Education and Sports, on which media reported, *it does not imply free textbooks, and it is unclear whether a child can attend classes if his/her parents did not buy textbooks because of poverty or for any other reason.* For families with more children and where one or both parents are unemployed, this raises the question if they can fulfill this obligation, and if not, they could end up with the proceedings against them, and even are threaten with criminal penalties.

CCE asks the authorities: **do teachers violate the Constitution when they do not allow pupils without books to attend the classes, which is not unknown, and at the same time the Constitution stipulates free education?**

CCE invites the Government of Montenegro and the Ministry of Education and Sports to immediately resolve this issue without politicization and electoral manipulation, in cooperation with civil society. In that manner, Montenegro would fulfill the function of the state of social justice and equal access to education for future generations.

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