

Slovakia

A time of reform - but will Pericles' message be heeded?

Slovaks voted for a change of government last June. The new government has stated explicitly that building a knowledge-based society is its priority. In fact, the official title of the second-ranked minister is Deputy Prime Minister for the Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. In its election manifesto, the government committed itself, among other things, to raising the salaries of teachers, providing multi-source financing for education, and making the management of the education system more efficient. With regard to vocational training, the new government also committed itself to coordinating VET and the labour market, creating new fields of studies, and supporting a continuum of education and training programmes. An encouraging development indeed.

Based on this manifesto, the Ministry of Education has now set the following priorities and deadlines:

- the establishment of a two-level model of educational programmes in VET by 31 May 2007;
- the creation of a system of coordination of vocational education for the labour market by 31 March 2007;
- the elaboration of a proposal for criteria for the participation of employers' and employees' associations in vocational education, also by 31 March 2007; and
- continuous and permanent cooperation between employers' and employees' associations, professional guilds, and the central bodies of state and local administration for the implementation of new study and training branches.

All tasks related to the fulfilment of the objectives of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme and the Lisbon Strategy will be permanently monitored and coordinated by the Section of European Integration of the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, according to the 2007 plan of legislative tasks, a demanding schedule of legislative work is envisaged; four new acts and two amendments of acts, covering lifelong learning, youth, the status of teaching staff in schools, etc. In addition, the act on higher education was amended in February to bring the higher education system more in line with the Bologna Declaration; amendments related to Council Directives on the admission of third-country nationals for study and for scientific research will follow.

No doubt the plan is very ambitious. It is not clear, whether lawmakers and decision makers will manage to respect these deadlines while also allowing for fair debate of the issues. Hopefully, the message of Pericles from his funeral oration will be heeded: *'instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all'*.

Further information:

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(The Manifesto of the Government in English)