Greece was obliged to take the necessary measures to gradually correct its economic indicators by:

- reducing public spending,
- reforming the public sector, improving its performance and eliminating its corruption,
- restructuring the pensions system, and
- supporting the private sector to ensure economic development. These measures are described in detail in the much discussed agreement-document known as the “Memorandum” (Mnimonio).

The Greek Education System

The modern Greek state has been characterised by the harsh political climate, which existed since its formation (1830) and expansion (1830-1948), which hardened after the Second World War and resulted in a civil war (1945-1949) and later a dictatorship (1967-1974). The Greek education system was constructed under a common policy adopted by all governments aiming first to bridge political polarisation and to achieve “national reconciliation” and, secondly, to build a national identity through ethnic, social and religious traditions. This was accomplished through a centralised national curriculum compulsory for all schools, as well as a centralised education management system by which almost all decisions are taken by the Ministry of Education. These include: a) teachers’ recruitment and payments b) teachers’ transfers and secondments within the country, and c) selection of teachers for senior positions. However, since 1982 there has been no teachers’ appraisal system and the Ministry of Education struggles to implement a new one because of teachers’ unions’ opposition.

Nevertheless socio-political and economic changes during the 1990’s, such as the economic growth, the improvement of the population’s educational level, and the large immigration to Greece made educational reforms more essential than ever.

The reform process, which began in the late 1990’s aims to modernise and decentralise the education system. However, as many authors comment, it remains an uncompleted task (Persianis, 1998; Pigiaki, 1999; Gouvias, 2007).

The Implications of the Financial Crisis

The four items of documentation-legislation introduced since the beginning of 2010 and related directly or indirectly to measures against the effects of economic crisis are:

- “The updated Greek programme of stability and development” by the Ministry of Finance. This is the government’s economic programme which aims to solve the fiscal problem of Greece using a variety of measures aiming at the reduction of the deficit and at structural reforms in both public finances and the rest of the economy (Ministry of Economics, 2010). This document is important because it was submitted to the European Commission in January of 2010.
and, secondly, because this programme determines the context within which all others might function.

- The Law 3833/2010, “Protection of Greek economy-urgent measures for the treatment of the fiscal crisis”. This provides measures such as:
  I. Reduction of wages in the public sector
  II. Reduction of recruitment in the public sector
  III. Increase of VAT and other taxes for specific goods

- The Law 3848/2010, “Upgrade of educators’ role – establishment of rules for assessment and meritocracy in education” by four ministries among which is the Ministry of Education. This Law deals with issues that have been considered at least three times since 1997 by governments of both major political parties. It aims to restructure the specific part of the educational administrative system related to:
  I. Teachers’ recruitment system. According to the new arrangements it remains fully centralised. However new teachers will be hired only:
    a. after accrediting their pedagogical proficiency (through a university course similar to the Post Graduate Certificate of Education in the United Kingdom), and
    b. After being successful in centrally organized exams held every two years by a state organisation named the “Superior Committee of Personnel Selection” (ASEP).

Their appointment will be followed by a two year probationary period under the supervision of a “mentor”. At the end of this period there will be an assessment. Those teachers successful in terms of teaching competency will become permanent; otherwise they will be transferred to other public services. According to the Minister of Education Mrs. Diamantopoulou, not all graduates of universities are fitted to become teachers and the aim of the new process is to select the most suitable. Many commentators and the unions claim that these are only measures to reduce teachers’ recruitment as, because of the continuation of tenure in the public sector, there is no possibility of dismissal.

II. Reduction of teachers’ employment rights such as:
    a. secondments and transfers (from school to school within LEA),
    b. from LEA to another LEA,
    c. secondments to the Ministry’s main building, universities, state libraries, offices of Members of Parliament, Archdioses of the Orthodox Church and other public positions,
    d. secondments to Greek schools abroad, and
    e. promotions to higher positions.

III. The obligation of teachers to undertake five more hours overtime weekly if required by the head teacher.

IV. New teachers’ appraisal system.

- The Ministry of Education’s document-brochure “The New School – The pupil first”. This document announced the “new” education reform using two catch phrases: “the pupil/student first” and “no school and no child left behind”. It gives prioritises to issues such as:
  i. the integration of new technologies in the teaching process
  ii. new curricula
  iii. the connection of the new technological school with the local market
  iv. new in-service training scheme of teachers (a combination of face to face teaching and distance learning) out of school time.
  v. greater emphasis on foreign languages
  vi. the extension of primary schooling from 13.15 to 14.00 for all year groups
  vii. the re-design and gradual generalisation of “All-day school” (optional classes running till 16:15).

**“Rationalisation of Human Resources”**

According to the Law 3833/2010 teachers’ recruitment for academic year 2010-2011 was to be reduced by 50% for permanent appointments and by 70% for one year contracted supply teachers. As far as the hourly paid teachers are concerned, the Ministry claims that this practice should be abolished. A reasonable question to ask is who will cover these hours?

The Ministry claims that the problem can be solved by:
- taking gradually all the teachers who are detached elsewhere back to the school of their official appointment.
- ensuring that all teachers work their obligatory teaching time, as well as the new compulsory overtime. Additionally there is a provision for transferring teachers from secondary schools (where there is a teacher surplus) to primary schools (where there is a shortage).

**References**


Law (1566/1985): „Structure and Operation of Primary and Secondary Education”


Ministry of Education circular (29188/G2, 14/03/2011): “Number of pupils per class”
● closing down the LEA branches and merging the Local Primary Education Authorities and the Local Secondary Education Authorities, as well as the Local Authorities of Physical Education and of Technical Vocational Education with the main Local Education Authority. It is anticipated first that a large number of teachers will be released and, secondly, a large amount of money will be saved.

● merging schools and classes with small numbers of pupils, and making sure that all classes are close to the legal limit of pupils per class, currently 25 pupils, with the possibility of this number reaching 28 in cases of lack of space or teaching staff (Ministry of Education, 2011). However, according to the fundamental Law of Education (Act 1566/1985) which dominates Ministerial decisions, this number should be 30 pupils per teacher. Therefore, there is much concern within the Greek education community that this number will become the norm.

In addition, following a series of ministerial decisions, the secondment of teachers to Greek schools abroad – which operate under the supervision of Greek Embassies and Greek communities, was cancelled – for academic year 2010-2011. Furthermore, another 20% of teachers, already seconded abroad, returned to Greece following an announcement by the new Minister that the number of teachers abroad was unreasonably large. Finally, no fresh study leave will be awarded to teachers accepted by universities for postgraduate studies.

This is summarised in the Minister’s statement on the “Rationalisation of Human Resources”.

Many commentators and teachers’ unions claim that the number of teachers occupied in other public positions is unlikely to cover the vacancies of the coming years. This is because such teachers serve in positions (such as in the Ministry of Education and LEA offices) which, due to the freeze of recruitment in the public sector, are most unlikely to be covered and, secondly, because the Ministry’s merger programme, is in question. This is chiefly because little attention has been paid by the Ministry to the social, institutional and geographical particularities of Greece, a mountainous country with hundreds of remote islands and villages and a large percentage of isolated rural schools. This makes it very difficult either to merge or to close the schools in areas which invariably have small numbers of pupils and which obviously need teachers to operate them. Furthermore, the announced extension of schooling from 13 to 14 (for all year groups), in conjunction with the limited teaching time of teachers (21-24 hours for primary school teachers and 16-21 hours for secondary teachers) makes the supposed class coverage almost unattainable.

Financial Implications

According to the Law 3833/2010 (“Protection of Greek Economy-Urgent measures for the treatment of fiscal crisis”) teachers’ wages have been reduced by an average of 10%. But for general education spending it is quite the opposite, the Government’s annual budget of 2010 (submitted in 11/2009) provided an increase at 10% as it was one of the lowest in the EU (3.1% of GNP). However two months later (01/2010) with a new Ministry of Finance’s decision (2/4431/25/01-2010, “Modification of budget-reserve fund 10 %”) the initial government’s annual budget was reduced by 10% for all ministries including the Ministry of Education. This meant that the initial increase was taken back, returning to the previous year’s low spending.

To this should be added the chronic inefficiencies of the education system with its poor infrastructure including:

● large number of dated school buildings,
● lack of libraries,
● limited new technology infrastructure,
● limited free spaces for PE, and
● lack of appropriate conditions for accommodating children until 16.15 in “All-day schools”, such as cooking facilities and dining areas.

Furthermore, a very important aspect of the situation is the ethical-psychological one which directly affects teachers’ work. This is the organized attack by the Ministry of Education leadership on teachers (through interviews in the media) presenting a negative picture of teachers to the wider society accusing them of being lazy and of resisting changes, while trying to mask the inefficiency of both the administrative system and of the political system (party sponsored trade unionism and clientism), the responsibi-
lity of politicians, including many members of today’s government.

### Conclusion

The Greek Government’s policies are focused on:
- reduction of teaching staff,
- cuts in school funding, and
- rationalisation of human resources which means curbing teachers’ employment rights and significant cuts in wages.

Such policies will affect the education system generally, as class numbers will become larger and the already limited resources available will be reduced further. However, some specific elements of the education system are expected to be affected to a larger degree as they are, unfortunately, considered to be of secondary priority. These include:
- Small schools in remote areas where the number of pupils is small,
- Intervention programmes which run in deprived areas and in schools with large number of pupils of migrant parents and more specifically: special needs classes which run within mainstream schools, tutorial classes again within mainstream schools for pupils with minor learning difficulties, and integration classes for speakers of other languages,
- Special education as many staff are not permanent, and
- Greek education provided to pupils of Greek origin abroad.

It could be said that the basis of the “New School” reform introduced in 2010 is in question, as it appears to be a product of the financial crisis rather than a reform aimed at educational improvement. The targets set by “New School” are difficult to achieve, bearing in mind the now chronic underfunding of education, the shortage of teaching staff, as well as the reaction of a demoralised and underpaid existing teaching staff.

We are not optimistic for the immediate future of the Greek education system given the present and continuing financial constraints. However, what began as a necessity may become an opportunity to focus on reforms that will provide both educational quality and managerial efficiency.