

## Executive Summary

### I Introduction

The aim of this text is to present the preliminary findings of the feasibility study relating to higher education development in the Preševo and Bujanovac municipalities. The development of higher education in these municipalities is driven by the need to provide education for the Albanian community in their mother tongue, as well as the intention to increase the overall level of education among the population as a precondition for economic development of the region and successful cooperation and integration among ethnic groups - the Albanian, Romani and Serbian communities. A higher education institution was opened in Medveđa in the 2009/10 academic year, providing teaching in Serbian and Albanian. The establishment of bilingual higher education programmes in Medveđa indicated a series of open issues relating to higher education of members of the Albanian national minority in the South of Serbia. The Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa (hereinafter: the Coordination Body), which facilitated the opening of higher education institutions in Medveđa in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, decided to implement a different approach to tackling the issue of higher education in the municipalities of Bujanovac and Medveđa. In consultations with the representatives of the Ministry of Education, it was concluded that the analysis of stakeholders and/or partners-to-be should be conducted, as well as an analysis of higher education in the region. Having in mind that the Coordination Body does not have the capacities to conduct such demanding and comprehensive research, it was decided that non-government organizations with many years of experience in these areas should be entrusted with the preparation of the analysis.

The **Centre for Non-violent Resistance** (hereinafter: CNR), a non-government organization from Belgrade which has implemented projects in the South of Serbia and conducted a number of analyses over the previous years, launched the study preparation activities. The CNR drafted the project entitled "Reform of Education Policy in the South of Serbia" in cooperation with the Coordination Body, and competed for the funds of the Fund for an Open Society. The Fund for an Open Society (hereinafter: FOS) supported the project and financed the research with RSD 2,070,000, enabling the launch of the feasibility study. Considering that the envisaged Study entailed an analysis of opportunities for higher education development, subject to complex legal regulations and procedures specific for the system of education, there was a need to involve an organization with experience and expertise in the educational system of Serbia. The CNR engaged the Centre for Education Policy (hereinafter: CEP) as a principal author of the expert segment of the Study. The CEP Research Team was established in August 2009 gathering: **Jana Bačević** (Coordinator of the Research Team), **Ivana Božić**, **Vanja Ivošević**, **Marija Mitrović**, **Ivan Rajković** and **Jasmina Selmanović**, and **Tajana Brkanović (CNR)**. **Mihajlo Babin** and **Iskra Maksimović** from the Faculty of Economy, Finance and Administration of the Singidunum University of Belgrade (hereinafter: FEFA), took part in the development of economic and financial aspects of the analysis. The case studies were conducted by **Tajana Brkanović (CNR)**, **Tanja Ivošević**, **Ivana Stanojev (CNR)** and **Norbert Šabić (CEP)**. **Slobodan Bošković** was the CNR Project Coordinator, with **Ivana Stanojev** as Assistant. Unimpeded and quality research activities in the Preševo and Bujanovac municipalities were facilitated by Local Coordinators **Rahim Salihu** and **Predrag Belej**, as well as **Gazmend Selmani**. Putting together a team that would involve all partners most effectively, the CNR, the CEP and the Coordination Body turned to the OSCE in Serbia and the Office of the High Representative for National Minorities seated in Hague for help. The OSCE High Representative for National Minorities supported the development of the study by providing expertise and engaging and authorizing the consultant **Sebastian Dworack** to assist the

Research Team. The study was reviewed by Paola Petrić and edited by Ana Luković. Danijela Nenadić took part in the preparation of the study as a representative of the Coordination Body. This study is a result of close cooperation and partnership between the non-government sector, state authorities and international community representatives.

Two members of the Research Team, along with the representatives of the Centre for Non-violent Resistance and the OSCE, made a preliminary visit to the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in September 2009. Field research in these municipalities, as well as the research segments conducted in Belgrade, was performed in October and November. The field research included in-depth interviews (discussions) with key stakeholders in the higher education development process targeting national minorities in the South of Serbia: representatives of the Government of Serbia, the Ministry of Education and the Coordination body; representatives of local communities; representatives of civil society; representatives of international organizations; representatives of the academic community (higher education institutions). In addition to the interviews, focus groups with high school students, parents and groups of businessmen in the territory of Preševo and Bujanovac were conducted. The second part of the research includes case studies in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Macedonia. The case studies provide an overview of the framework of education in national minority languages and an analysis of how the implemented solutions have contributed to resolving the issues of education, integration and building relations within ethnically diverse societies. The case studies are based on the collection of existing information and analyses, as well as interviews with key stakeholders conducted in the field in January and February 2010. Conducting case studies would not have been possible without the support provided by the Department for International Development – DfID, for whose support we are grateful. The Balkan Trust for Democracy also provided ample support for conducting the study.

## **II Theoretical and Methodological Framework and a Description of the Study**

The Research Team decided in favour of a qualitative approach implying a form of **ethnography** and/or extended visits to the field and in-depth interviews with various local community representatives and other key stakeholders. This type of methodology was selected because the Research Team did not want the study to result in a single irrevocable solution which would subsequently be „imposed“. On the contrary, the aim was to collect and analyse the **issues, opinions** and **standpoints** of stakeholders and then, based on the results, to describe various models of higher education development in the South of Serbia.

The bulk of the research was conducted in October and November 2009 during field visits to Preševo, Bujanovac, Medveđa and Niš. The total number of field visits, including the preliminary visit, was six, over a period of 20 days. More than 100 interviews were conducted, applying two techniques: interviews and focus groups. Most participants were interviewed, while focus groups were used when it was important to interview as many persons from a certain group as possible – i.e. secondary school and gymnasium students, parents, students in departments in Medveđa and entrepreneurs. Interviewing relied on the **in-depth interview** technique. Interviewing was conducted based on a framework questionnaire, aiming to have the respondents feel free to express their attitudes, opinions and beliefs, enabling a more “natural” course of the interviews.

The interviews conducted during field visits may be divided into three groups: interviews conducted in Belgrade - with representatives of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and other decision-making participants; interviews held with the staff of the University of Niš (in Niš and Medveđa) and students in Medveđa; and interviews conducted in the field and/or during research visits to Preševo and Bujanovac.

Three groups of responses were defined: issues, solutions and standpoints. Proposals relating to higher education were extracted and used as a foundation for developing potential solutions to higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac. It should be underlined that the responses presented herein represent an overview of the most important and common components; a more detailed description is provided in the integral text of the study.

### III Analysis of the Findings

A point raised by almost all respondents is that the main *issues* in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa are of **economic** nature. One of the most prominent issues is low economic development and the related high unemployment rate. These two issues cause “brain-drain”, i.e. what has been perceived as a high level of migration from the municipalities towards more developed regions in Serbia and neighbouring countries.

**A lack of higher education in the Albanian language** was also identified as integral to this issue. Namely, the lack of opportunities for higher education in their mother tongue means that some members of the Albanian community shall attain lower qualifications (resulting in reduced employment opportunities), while many youths pursue higher education in University centres where instruction in Albanian exists - Tetovo, Priština or Tirana. The respondents indicated that a number of youths remain in these study centres because of increased employment opportunities and because of the problems with accrediting their diplomas in Serbia, in particular those issued in Kosovo.

Many respondents mentioned issues relating to **inter-ethnic relations**, in particular those between members of the Serbian and Albanian community. Agreeing that there is no conflict, the respondents often indicate that this is the result of segregated life and education in particular. Therefore, separated education is pointed out as one of the main issues.

In line with the subject of the study and the identified problems, respondents mostly agree that **the development of higher education in the Albanian language in the municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac** represents the most important *solution*. They often underlined that it is important to ensure support by the state to finance this form of education, since low living standards and the high unemployment rate do not allow many citizens to pay for studies. One assumption is that the development of higher education in the Albanian language shall financially enable the members of this community to study, and shall facilitate their integration into the labour market of the Republic of Serbia and help them with finding employment.

Many respondents indicated the relevance of **investments into economic development**, underlining that education alone may not boost the economy. The respondents highlighted the relevance of the state in the development of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, through the development of higher education and a comprehensive strategy to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of this region of Serbia.

Regarding the *attitudes* of the respondents, in addition to the ones already mentioned, most were related to their perception of inter-ethnic relations, as well as their position in relation to the socio-economic context. It should be mentioned that most respondents said that there is no conflict between ethnic communities (Albanian, Romani and Serbian), but there is no particularly developed communication either. Irrespective of their affiliations or the declared ethnic distance and/or whether they ascribe segregation among communities to their “innate” characteristics, almost all respondents believe that **a higher level of integration should be attained**, and that higher education development involving all members of all communities would be a good step to this end. This draws our attention to the relevance that respondents ascribe to public policies in

the context of the economic and social map of the region, both today and in the future. However, it should be mentioned that the perception of respondents linked to their position in the socio-economic context is mostly negative. To put it simply, the respondents perceive Preševo and Bujanovac as regions with little prospect for development and a number of youths indicate that they are planning to leave. This confirms the need for higher education development – as a direct opportunity to attain qualifications and to find employment and income, but just as importantly to develop an understanding of their own capacities, both for young and older people. Furthermore, this aspect is important for improving economic and general living conditions, as well as for the opportunities available for the citizens of Preševo and Bujanovac to participate fully in social life and decision-making at the local, national and regional levels.

#### **IV Potential Solutions for Higher Education Development**

It should be mentioned that few respondents had a complete understanding of higher education development. Suggestions most often included the type of study program, the language or in some cases the type of institution. The mentioned options are given in the text below and are then analyzed within categories. Finally, the main recommendations are outlined. Various aspects of solutions often overlap in practice and may not be fully separated during analysis, nor is this desirable. The given classification is important for the development of practical solutions because it underlines the fact that each proposed solution has its advantages and disadvantages - a *single ideal solution* is difficult to identify.

##### **1. Study Levels**

The attitude predominant among institutions and respondents is that the level of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac should be delivered primarily on the level of **first level studies (basic studies)**. In this sense, basic academic studies dominate in relation to professional career studies, which may be ascribed to the “prestige” of the academic studies and the fact that many respondents do not make a clear distinction between the two types of studies. However, second and third level studies are almost completely absent from the discussions.

However, this does not alter the fact that from the perspective of long-term education development, social integration and economy, including the reform of education within the Bologna process, one should take into account further development of students primarily in second level studies, either by long-term development in these municipalities or by facilitating the continuation of studies in university centres in the country and abroad. This does not necessarily have to be integral to the development of higher education in the South of Serbia at this moment, but it is important to take into consideration further development within a longer-term development perspective.

##### **2. Institutional Framework**

###### **2a. Founder**

The Law on Higher Education envisages that a higher education institution may be founded by the “Republic, a legal entity or a natural person, in accordance with the law” (Law on Higher Education, Article 40). In the first case, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopts the decision on the foundation thereof. In the course of the research, some respondents mentioned the possibility of foundation by a natural person or a legal entity (potentially a higher education institution from abroad). In spite of this possibility, it should be mentioned that the **development**

**of higher education within an institution founded by the Republic** has a number of advantages. The key difference relating to founders is the financing mechanism. When founding a higher education institution, the Republic provides funds for a number of items including material expenditures, maintenance and investment, employee's wages and a number of student openings funded from the budget. The scope of financing is regulated by separate by-laws. The issue of financing is relevant for future students and their parents. Namely, taking into consideration the unemployment rate and poverty in the region, it is almost certain that only a few students (or their parents) could afford the studies. This was also confirmed during the interviews. Therefore, the previous solution entailing the development of higher education within institutions founded by the Republic has significant advantages, since it enables **budget-funded openings** and makes higher education available for students who would not be able to afford it.

In addition to a sufficient number of budget-funded openings for students, it is important to develop a system of support for **student standards**. This entails the existence of **student loans and scholarships** (available at the level of the Republic, which would in this case be available under equal conditions for students from Preševo and Bujanovac), as well as the opportunity for long-term development of other forms of support such as student cafeterias, discounted transportation (in particular between Bujanovac and Preševo), etc. The issue of financial support for students is highly important for enabling equal access to higher education, irrespective of the individual financial situations of students. In this sense, additional funds, scholarships or loans should be considered, available to students from marginalized and vulnerable groups, and not only for those who excelled during previous education. The cooperation of local and national authorities to develop a system of support for students is extremely important.

## **2b. Type of the Institution**

The Law on Higher Education (Article 32) envisages that higher education activities may be delivered by the following higher education institutions: universities, faculties or academies of arts within universities, academies of professional career studies, colleges and colleges of professional career studies. From the perspective of education, the type of institutions where higher education in the region is to be developed shall have diverse implications.

A university, in addition to being the most prestigious, has the highest level of autonomy, both in the development of study and teaching plans and programmes (curricula) and in the selection of teaching staff. The establishment of universities involves a decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia to establish the university, the process of obtaining a working permit involving the process of accreditation of the university and its study programmes, in line with the procedure prescribed by the Law on Higher Education and described in Chapter V. Furthermore, the Law on Higher Education sets forth that the university shall have studies from at least three scientific fields at all levels of academic studies (basic academic studies, graduate academic – masters' studies and doctoral studies). Within the currently available capacities for the development of higher education structures and staff, the opening of a university would not be feasible within a short or mid-term period.

Another institutional option is a faculty, or a number of faculties. The establishment of a faculty entails that the founder of the faculty must be an established university, considering that the Law on Higher Education does not allow for the establishment of faculties as autonomous higher education institutions. The current universities would have to submit a request to complement the working permit and undergo the process of accreditation for the new faculties and the pertaining study programmes, in line with the procedure prescribed by the law on

Higher Education and described in Chapter V. From an educational perspective, the solution would have certain advantages, since it would enable the concentration and increased commitment of teaching staff, who would in that case be engaged primarily in this institution.

A higher education institution may establish a higher education unit outside its seat, without the capacity of a legal entity. The higher education unit outside the seat without the capacity of a legal entity entails the delivery of study programmes outside the seat of the higher education institution in the organization and within the administration of the already existing faculty within the university or in case of interdisciplinary studies within the administration of the university. The decision on establishing a higher education unit outside the seat is adopted by the higher education institution. The institution then submits the request to complement the working permit which entails the accreditation of programmes in line with the procedure prescribed in the Law on Higher Education.

The establishment of colleges and/or colleges of professional career studies also entails the process of issuing working permits and accreditation. Although they do not have to be founded by a university, they are subject to the same regulation as autonomous higher education institutions, meaning that their establishment entails the issuing of working permits and accreditation. On the other hand, the social (i.e. cultural) aspect plays a significant role in the attitude of the respondents to these institutions. These institutions are perceived as “inferior” in status to faculties, mostly because the most respondents learnt about the education system when, although they were called “higher”, these institutions had an inferior status and as a rule prepared students for occupations that were appreciated and paid less. Although the current definition of colleges and colleges of professional career studies enable pursuit of further professional development (specialist studies), as can be seen from the description of the education system, it is still limited.

From a social standpoint, the establishment of a university would probably be the most appealing option to the local population, in particular to members of the Albanian nationality. Faculties as institutions are next on the prestige list: however, it seems that most local stakeholders do not make a distinction between faculties and higher education units without the capacity of a legal entity (which may be seen in the project in Medveđa being referred to as “faculty(ies)”, , even though they are in fact higher education units without the capacity of a legal entity). It should be mentioned that higher education units without the capacity of a legal entity operate, financially and administratively, within a higher education institution and/or faculty within which they are established.

It should be emphasized that the process of creating opportunities for higher education in the South of Serbia, irrespective of the type of institution selected by the stakeholders, depends on the process of obtaining a working permit and accreditation in line with the procedures and standards prescribed by the Law and by-laws. Both processes require careful preparation of the necessary documentation, which shall take a certain period of time.

### **3. Study Programmes**

Based on the reasons and/or explanations provided by the respondents, the proposed study programmes may be divided into three groups: **general**, **applicable** and **development** programmes.

The first group (“**general**”) includes study programmes in fields perceived by the respondents as programmes which shall provide the widest range of employment. These programmes include law, economy, banking and finance, management and, to an extent, computer science. The

respondents believe that these programmes shall provide for easiest employment, probably because they provide the most general knowledge and competencies. Furthermore, these profiles may become “usable” if economy in the region picks up, but should be applicable in other parts of the country as well. The successful development of a study programme in the field of law may contribute to multilingualism in public administration and facilitate communication in legal processes. Of course, it should be noted that dealing with law in the Republic of Serbia requires excellent knowledge of the Serbian language, while dealing with law in another country requires excellent knowledge of the legal system of the country in question. In this sense, the focus on law studies in a multilingual environment would imply the development of competencies in the Serbian language.

Another group of study programmes was referred to as "**applicable**" since these are occupations, knowledge and competencies which may be applied directly and/or used on the labour market in Preševo and Bujanovac. This group of programmes includes medical studies, teacher training programmes and study programmes which would enable knowledge or translation between the Albanian and Serbian languages.

Since the health care system is public, and since it is almost certain that living standards would not allow the majority population in Preševo and Bujanovac to be visited by private doctors, this issue plays a significant role in relations with and trust in the state and public services. However, medical studies are expensive and call for an infrastructure (laboratories, equipment) currently nonexistent in Preševo and Bujanovac. A possible model to consider is to open medical studies where students would attend the first year in Preševo and Bujanovac and would continue them in university centres in Serbia. Such a model would entail the development of a special first year programme which would enable the overcoming of language barriers, as well as the provision of separate budget-financed openings and financial support for students who would continue their studies in university centres in Serbia. Although such a solution would be positive from the standpoint of integration in the educational and professional system of the Republic of Serbia, it would require a systemic resolution of problems relating to studying in towns other than Preševo and Bujanovac – primarily financial ones, as well as problems relating to the feeling of insecurity or lack of safety that many members of the Albanian community link to the idea of studying in towns where they represent a minority.

Teaching profiles are mostly founded on the perception of a lack of qualified teaching staff – primarily staff who would deliver instruction in the Albanian language and qualified teachers for the Serbian language (almost all respondents, irrespective of their ethnicity, underlined the lack of qualified staff for teaching the Serbian language and literature, as corroborated by the data provided by the National Employment Service). It need not be mentioned that this fact further hinders the possibility of interethnic communication which entails that at least one group is fluent in the language of the other group. Therefore, it would be desirable to develop programmes for educating teachers in the Romani language, as well as for subjects such as the Roma culture etc.

The relevance of teacher competencies is invaluable. Therefore, the development of study programmes for teachers (and pre-school teachers) is important both in the context of “filling” job openings and in the sense of developing competencies which shall facilitate the successful shaping of new generations. Furthermore, one should take into account possible rapid labour market saturation, i.e. filling in available job openings, as was the case in Montenegro. One possible solution is to develop the activities of the institution in such a way as to, in addition to or after graduate academic studies, enable the development of programmes for licensing and professional development of teachers. Thus the teaching staff would be given the opportunity

(which has become mandatory) to develop professionally during their career, and the sustainability of programmes would be ensured.

When it comes to learning or translation between the Albanian and Serbian languages, it is obvious that there is a pressing need for educated professionals who are fluent in both languages. Although both profiles are important and would contribute to language competencies and the development of the communities' identities, it should be considered that the knowledge of both languages in this region is primarily, at least for now, perceived as a means (to increase the efficiency of public administration and other public services) and not a goal in itself. In this regard, the integration of both languages within other study programmes would represent a good and useful initial step; studies directed specifically to competencies in both languages may be developed simultaneously, but it is important to ensure the employability of graduate students in various fields.

Finally, the last group of study programmes was referred to as **development** programmes. These programmes include technical, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, agricultural, technological (food technology), catering and tourism programmes. These areas are recognized to have the potential to develop the economy of the region, focusing either on generic competencies (technical sciences, mechanical engineering, civil engineering), or on the development of potentials recognized as differential advantages of Preševo and Bujanovac (tourism, catering, economy, food technology). These programmes are significant because the respondents recognized them as a driving force for generating economic development in the region, which may contribute to an increase in employment and overall living standards. However, these programmes require careful planning and strong partnership with the business sector: all these programmes require practice and should result in obtaining applicable skills. Therefore, such profiles should be developed, yet in partnership with the business sector from the region, both large and small and medium-sized enterprises.

It may be concluded that the selection of fields wherefrom the study programmes in Preševo and Bujanovac shall be developed should be guided by the wishes of future students, as well as the employment opportunities offered by specific professions regarding their deficit in the labour market and their potential to initiate economic development. Therefore, the most important profiles are those in the field of law, economy, teacher training and technology (food) or mechanical engineering. Furthermore, it was indicated that there is a need in all areas for qualified professionals who are fluent in Serbian and Albanian, as well as English or another foreign language.

#### **4. Target Group**

##### **4a. Target Group**

It is important to underline that the predominant social perception of the respondents during field research (in particular in initial stages) was that the project of opening a higher education institution within the territory of Preševo and Bujanovac was intended primarily for members of the Albanian community. In the analytical sense, it is obvious that education programmes intended exclusively for members of specific groups do not contribute to social cohesion and integration. Higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac should target all the population irrespective of their ethnic (or other) affiliation and efforts should be invested into making it accessible. However, the main challenge in this sense represents the organization of teaching and/or language, teaching staff and textbooks.

##### **4b. Language of Instruction**

When it comes to the language in which instruction is delivered, if arguments against organizing teaching exclusively in Albanian or Serbian are accepted, there is the possibility to consider possible solutions for delivering teaching in both languages, with the Romani language as a potential third language. Two solutions are mentioned most frequently: one of separate classes with instruction in each language, and another with simultaneous interpretation from one language to the other.

The first solution implies that teaching is delivered simultaneously in Serbian and Albanian, and that students attend some lectures or activities together. Although most respondents favour this solution, which would enable simpler attendance for students, the organization of such instruction has its problems. Namely, language competencies of university professors indicate that in this case one group of teachers would deliver teaching in Albanian, and the other in Serbian. This would probably result in some problems relating to the coordination of study programmes and/or learning contents, as well as the examination and grading methods.

Some respondents proposed that the “joint” classes for students from both communities should be delivered in English. This would be an excellent solution from an educational point of view, because the students would be enabled to follow instruction in English in addition to their mother tongue. However, this presents even more demanding organizational requirements, taking into account the teachers’ competency to deliver instruction in the English language.

However, a very important issue reflected in the responses is that higher education development requires, even as an optional subject, the learning of the other language of the community. When it comes to Serbian, its knowledge, even at the level of formal communication, is a necessary condition for the integration of the citizens of Albanian nationality within a wider framework of the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, citizens of Serbian nationality seldom know the Albanian language. It is certain that mastering both languages would have positive consequences on the interaction and communication of the members of all communities; higher education is an area where this could become a practice. It is possible, therefore, to make the learning of the other language optional, or even mandatory; at the same time, it is possible to establish joint “study groups” for speakers of the Serbian and Albanian language, where they could help each other in learning the other language (such informal groups are standard practice in many universities abroad). As mentioned, the studying of the Romani language could also be included in some study programmes. In combination with learning the English language, this model may enable students to master at least three languages upon finishing their studies, which would certainly represent an advantage in terms of employment.

The solution which envisages simultaneous interpretation from one language to the other, even temporarily, also implies a number of issues. The first large issue is the quality of interpretation. Simultaneous interpretation requires excellent knowledge of both languages – the source and the target language – and knowledge of specific terminology and literature. As has been the case in Medveđa, finding staff with such capacities is very difficult, in particular having in mind that quality simultaneous interpretation requires the simultaneous work of at least two interpreters, irrespective of the language of the lecture. Low quality of interpretation may influence unfavorably the motivation of students to attend lectures in the long run. If teaching is to be delivered in parallel in two languages, a percentage of joint lectures (where a number of students would listen to simultaneous interpretation), including guest lecturers, should be considered. In combination with teaching the other language within the study programme, this may eventually enable most students to listen to at least some lectures in both languages.

Therefore, it is of key importance to provide an opportunity for each community to attend at least a segment of the programme in their mother tongue, as well as to develop language competencies in languages of other communities and in English. This may be achieved through the organization of joint activities – academic (e.g. lectures by guest professors, “study groups”), as well as other activities (sports associations, clubs, student organizations, etc).

#### **4c. Teaching Staff**

The language of instruction shall set the needs for teaching staff. In this case this calls for the engagement of qualified staff for teaching in Albanian and in Serbian. The most obvious solution is that lecturers whose mother tongue is Serbian come from the institution (university and/or faculty) organizing the study programme. However, it is important to ensure that the teaching staff shall dedicate enough time to the study programme, including the preparation of lectures, communication and consultations with students. Simple “copying” of teaching plans and programmes of another institution leaves a bad impression and demotivates students, not to mention insufficient commitment on the part of the teacher. In this context, assistants and/or associate professors have an important role in the teaching process. Students of doctoral studies, usually young people, often have higher professional motivation to work with new groups of students. On the one hand this may represent financial relief during doctoral studies and, on the other, it would contribute to interaction and communication among students and teaching staff.

Most respondents assume that there are qualified professionals speaking Albanian in Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac. This, of course, is the easiest and most favorable option, but it should be kept in mind that teaching at the university level presumes the possession of at least the title of Ph.D. It is possible to engage young people from Preševo and Bujanovac as associate professors. Ideally, these shall be students of masters or doctoral studies (in Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia or Albania). It is also possible to offer scholarships to young graduate students from Preševo and Bujanovac based on their position of associate professors within study programmes in Preševo and Bujanovac. This practice is a common model of financing postgraduate studies, both abroad and (lately) in some universities in Serbia. It fulfills two functions: on the one hand, it provides for the presence of qualified young staff to deliver lectures and, on the other, it helps develop human capital in the region of Preševo and Bujanovac, by providing a highly qualified labor force. Associate professors could, of course, become teachers with full working time upon finishing doctoral studies.

When it comes to other potential sources of teaching staff fluent in Albanian, respondents mostly proposed the engagement of permanent or guest lecturers from the South-East European University in Tetovo, University in Tirana or University in Priština. There are indications that some lecturers (in particular in Tetovo) have competencies to lecture in Albanian and Serbian, as well as in English, wherefore this option deserves further investigation. Another option is to investigate whether these institutions have a registry of students who are about to finish their doctoral studies, or to contact the Ministry of Education whether they have a registry of students who finished their doctoral studies abroad. Education trends indicate that there are going to be more and more such young people, and that they will not necessarily be able to find employment immediately. The position of assistant professor at a study programme in Preševo and Bujanovac would represent a good starting point for their further career.

#### **4d. Textbooks**

Closely related to the issues of language and staff is also the issue of textbooks and other teaching materials. This is particularly predominant in the perception of respondents who

usually assume that each professor has their “own” textbook. Although such solutions are acceptable in the short run, in a longer run they may represent a serious problem of parallelism and/or lack of coherence between teaching programmes: if each group of students studies in one language and from one group of textbooks, lecturers and a grading system, an important issue is what the link between the two groups is and whether this should be referred to as a single study programme. Therefore, in time the syllabi and curricula, as well as the joint activities/lectures and student competencies in both languages should be unified. In this process, it is important to keep in mind the criteria for quality: students do not benefit much from learning from low quality, badly written or badly translated textbooks. Generally speaking, **quality assurance** within the organization of study programmes, curricula and teaching processes is of key importance for the success of this initiative.

## **5. Infrastructure Issues**

### **5a. Location**

An ideal solution would be to develop higher education in both towns – Preševó and Bujanovac. This would preclude any potential conflict regarding the location, but also contribute to a more balanced economic development. However, even if this does not occur, the distance between the towns is far from insurmountable. Therefore, students living in one town shall find it simple to study in the other. Naturally, as noted in the context of student standards, this would entail the development of efficient transport lines between the two towns, adjusted to the needs and budgets of students.

### **5b. Facility**

The issue of the facility wherein instruction for future student programmes shall take place is closely related to the location. Similar to the attitudes relating to the town, the local population is inclined to point out the advantages of local facilities. In the context of social issues and integration, the best option would certainly be to develop higher education in both Preševó and Bujanovac, thus engaging all local capacities. The facilities in Bujanovac could, for example, be used for profiles presuming a smaller number of students, such as teacher training or tourism and catering, whereas those in Preševó could be used for the development of larger study programmes in banking, management, technology, mechanical engineering, agriculture, and, potentially, law and economy. Field research indicated goodwill among the population. Therefore, implementing the projects would primarily depend on good planning and coordination between the contractors and local communities.

### **5c. Administrative and Informational Capacities**

When it comes to administrative capacities, functional and accessible administration is important, in particular a student service, operating in the languages of the communities attending higher education. Student services should provide both administrative and counselling support for students, particularly in cases of difficulties (financial and other) encountered during the studies.

Similarly, it is important to develop a good information system accessible to students and other stakeholders (e.g. potential students, their parents, etc.). However, attention should primarily be given to access to computer technology and the level of computer skills of the students and staff: a computer centre should be provided, where students could have free access to computers, along with training in the use of computers and the Internet, particularly in the context of academic activities.

A conclusion is that the development of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac should take into consideration balanced development of the region, respecting the specific characteristics of each municipality. Special attention should be paid to infrastructural capacities, not only regarding the location (facility) for delivering higher education, but also transportation and ensuring efficient work of administrative and information support. The fact that local communities seem prepared to provide support and coordination in this process is encouraging.

#### **IV Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **X Conclusion**

As may be concluded from the abovementioned, the development of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac represents a challenging and demanding undertaking: specific characteristics of the region, different desires of the stakeholders and a consensus on the need to develop higher education in all areas results in great expectations and makes fast and exclusive conclusions both undesirable and unfeasible. Therefore, the aim of this study was not to identify a single solution excluding all others, but to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of all potential solutions, both regarding objective capabilities and limitations, as well as the desires of those to be directly or indirectly involved in this process. The conclusion thus provides certain general recommendations and proposes certain steps and/or ways to implement them.

1. The higher education development process in Preševo and Bujanovac is only starting. This case study aimed to outline potential development directions, but the greatest share of further planning will depend on the stakeholders – **the Ministry of Education, the Coordination Body, academic community, municipal authorities**, representatives of **local communities, civil society** and others. The cooperation of all stakeholders in this process will be vital for its success. The following may be proposed to this end:
  - That the stakeholders establish a working group (as part of the Ministry of Education or the Coordination Body) with a primary task to plan further and implement the development of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac. In addition to already mentioned stakeholders (the Ministry of Education, the Coordination Body, academic community, municipal authorities, representatives of local communities, civil society), the inclusion of international and local experts from the domain of higher education development is desirable;
  - That a constant dialogue be instituted between the working group, the bodies it comprises and the members of the Albanian and Serbian community at the local level (through meetings, forums, discussions). This step is necessary to ensure a continued involvement and activities of all stakeholders in the process.

2. The process of higher education development in Preševo and Bujanovac should take place within the **institutional framework of the Republic of Serbia**. This framework has many advantages: in addition to providing for easier and faster integration, both in society and the labour market, it envisages greater potential for support to students in the process of obtaining higher education, making it more accessible. The following may be proposed to this end:
  - That the development of higher education within the territory of Preševo and Bujanovac be part of an existing higher education institution founded by the Republic of Serbia. In addition to the University of Niš, options include the State University of Novi Pazar, the University of Kragujevac, but also universities in Belgrade or Novi Sad and/or faculties of these universities;
  - The legal requirements and limits should be observed in this process. Even though the development of higher education within an existing institution somewhat reduces the duration of the establishment process, the current legislative framework prescribes obtaining a work permit and the process of accreditation. Therefore, expert input by the legal and academic community should be integrated (particularly regarding accreditation experiences) in order to arrive at the fastest and simplest solution for implementing specific initiatives, once they are developed.
  
3. The development of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac should be sustainable; study programmes developed in these municipalities should meet the demands of the labour market, but also carry a potential to initiate economic development. This means that the choice of areas wherefrom study programmes will be implemented in Preševo and Bujanovac should not be based solely on the express wishes of potential beneficiaries, but also on objective capacities and needs. Likewise, due attention should be paid to the potential for labour market “saturation”. Constant provision of information on needs, lifelong learning and other forms of education should be developed in a way that would prevent this possibility. The following may be proposed to this end:
  - The development of study programmes for teachers, including teachers for the Serbian, Albanian and Romani languages. These occupations are in deficit in the region, being of significance both for the development of general and linguistic competencies, representing a prerequisite for successful interethnic communication. The development of study programmes for teachers could be undertaken with the cooperation of the University of Niš Teacher Training Faculty in Vranje, located in the relative proximity of Bujanovac. The development of study programmes for language teachers would involve cooperation with an institution with study programmes in Albanian, on the one hand, and the Serbian language and literature, on the other. The former exists at the University in Belgrade, while the latter exists at nearly any University in Serbia. As regards the Albanian language and literature, the possibility exists for developing joint study programmes with institutions in neighbouring countries. It is vital that although a diploma in a language and literature in Serbia provides the title of professor, i.e. teacher in a specific language, graduates of these study programmes would, having competencies in several languages and with additional training and conditions, be employable in public

administration and other services where knowledge of several languages represents an advantage.

- The development of study programmes in law, economy and computer science, i.e. areas developing general competencies subsequently applicable in a wide range of professions. Particular need was expressed for legal experts speaking Albanian and Serbian, who could work in public administration in addition to the judiciary. Likewise, fields such as economy (particularly banking and management) and computer science offer competencies potentially applicable in various environments, from financial institutions to small and medium-sized enterprises. The latter two programmes have the advantage of being relatively “universal”, therefore teaching materials do not have to be tailored specifically to the environment, as is the case with law.
  
  - The development of study programmes that would assist in the development of existing potentials in Bujanovac and Preševo, such as food technology, mechanical engineering, tourism and catering, etc. It is important to remember that the development of these types of programmes can only be undertaken in strong partnership with the business sector: to develop study programmes in industry-relevant areas before there is a strategy for economic development would not provide positive results in terms of employment. However, a strong partnership with the business sector would provide good motivation for both the educational as well as the industry sectors; these programmes can be developed as part of the strategies for the development of the Preševo and Bujanovac municipalities.
  
  - The development of teaching staff to carry out the new study programmes.
4. Higher education development in Preševo and Bujanovac must be **integrative** in terms of development of knowledge and competencies of the members of all communities. This entails developing study programmes both in the Serbian and Albanian languages and, ideally, in the Romani language as well. However, parallel instruction in multiple languages is not a solution in itself. Therefore, it is vital to develop joint activities, with some undertaken in the English language, in order to enable socialization and mutual communication between members of different communities. These activities should aim at developing knowledge of second (and third) languages used in Bujanovac and Preševo; one important point is to ensure good knowledge of the Serbian language as the official language among members of all communities, but also to have the members of the Serbian community to learn in Albanian, as well as the Romani language. This would facilitate mutual communication and also increase employment opportunities. Furthermore, knowledge of the English language should be fostered through potential joint academic and non-academic activities. However, the development of “parallel” programmes in each language should be avoided: higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac should be as integrated as possible, aiming to develop a common culture for the students and awareness of belonging to the same society. Thus integration should not only involve openness for members of all communities, but also the possibility for

everyone to partake in decision making and shaping the future of Preševo and Bujanovac together. To this end, the following may be developed:

- Study programmes including instruction in Serbian, Albanian, and at least in some cases, Romani. Due care should be given to providing legal preconditions for this type of instruction, as part of the statute of the institution undertaking it. Curricula should aim for as much integration, or similarity as possible, in order to avoid developing “parallel” programmes with few common points. This entails joint development of curricula in all languages. This process would have to be implemented through discussions of the teaching staff.
  
  - Human resources in terms of professors, associate professors and administrative personnel. This issue is of particular importance since the existing teaching staff is overworked. In an ideal situation, the staff should speak at least two of the three languages of the communities in Preševo and Bujanovac. Indications that these types of resources exist in the region arose in the course of the study, therefore the issue should be examined properly. In cases where the teaching staff speak only one language of instruction, the persons teaching in the Serbian language could be employed through existing higher education institutions in Serbia (with the potential for expanding their capacities), whereas persons teaching in Albanian could be employed through higher education institutions with instruction in the Albanian language from neighbouring countries (similar to the agreement of the University of Montenegro with universities in Tirana and Skadar<sup>1</sup>). It is possible that persons teaching in the Romani language could be contacted through local or international organizations tackling Roma rights. Key to this process, in addition to considering legal regulations relating to guest lecturers from local or international higher education institutions, is to develop good associate resources, potentially from the ranks of Preševo or Bujanovac doctorate students studying in Serbia or a neighbouring country. Associate professors provide for constant contact with students and assist them in the course of their studies. Therefore, in a sense they are even more important than professors and teachers. On the other hand, supporting associate professors would provide a constant influx of young teaching staff;
  
  - The development of joint student activities, regardless of whether they are academic (e.g. guest professor lectures) or non-academic (sports, student organizations and clubs, parties). This would stimulate an informal integration of students.
5. The development of higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac must take into account the **social dimension** of education. On the one hand, this would mean paying special attention to access to education for members of various marginalized and vulnerable groups (women/girls, the Roma, persons with special needs). On the other hand, it should be made clear that the goal of higher education is not only personal and regional economic development but that it – along with other levels of education – serves to stimulate the potential for active participation in the social life and decision making in the community. Therefore, the development of higher education should contribute not only to

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<sup>1</sup> See the case study on Montenegro.

enabling employment, but also a wider range of social competencies such as the capacity for critical thought and problem analysis, care for oneself and others and participation in decision making. To this end, the following may be developed:

- Programmes to promote higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac targeting vulnerable groups directly, i.e. providing information and choices in higher education;
- Support programmes for marginalized and vulnerable groups in terms of access and pursuing higher education, either through the establishment of quotas, support during studies (one-off financial assistance, counselling) or scholarships which shall be needs-based rather than merit-based. These types of support programmes can only be developed at the state and municipal level, as well as in cooperation with international organizations;
- Components of the education process and student life aimed at developing critical thinking, student participation, voluntary or charity work, better care of oneself and others, etc. This can be achieved through workshops, debates, discussions, student organizations and clubs, actions, etc. These types of activities, in addition to stimulating the integration of students, would contribute to an active contribution to their environment and their community, since these activities could target a community wider than the academic community. This could make higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac an integral part of the community contributing and developing along with it.

The general conclusion that can be drawn is that higher education development in Preševo and Bujanovac carries a lot of potential for economic development of the region but also – and perhaps more importantly – for developing social integration and better quality of life. Therefore this process should be approached with great care and consideration for the needs and capacities of the region, as well as the stakeholders. Only thus will higher education in Preševo and Bujanovac be able to fulfil its goal – a common and better future for all citizens.