Societatea Academică din România (SAR)
Strada Mihai Eminescu nr. 61, Bucureşti
tel-fax: 021 211 14 77
office@sar.org.ro
www.sar.org.ro

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

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What Works in Our Region?

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What Works in Our Region?

This study has been coordinated by Bucharest-based think tank Romanian Academic Society, as a regional research project. The study compiles several National Reports authored by the following experts:

Team Leader: **Corina Murafa**
National Experts:
Esteven Ikonomi (Albania)
Lyubomir Todorakov (Bulgaria)
Ana Mickovksa-Raleva (Macedonia)
Nina Brankovic (Montenegro)
Roxana Georgiana Radu and Claudiu Ivan (Romania)
Dejan Stankovic and Jelena Radisic (Serbia)
Eva Klemencic (Slovenia)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within the framework of the global research project "Varieties of Governance: Effective Public Service Delivery", undertaken under the umbrella of the Global Development Network, ten researchers in South-Eastern Europe examined the governance setup of educational systems in the region with the final purpose of trying to explain why educational outcomes have remained persistently low, and how they can be improved. More precisely, we described, analyzed and assessed the aims, objectives, functioning and effectiveness, in a cross-country comparative study, of existing Quality Assurance Systems (QASs) for basic education (grades 1-8/9) in Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia.

We regarded a QAS as an element of governance, by observing that all governments in the region have strived to put in place a governance and institutional framework through which they can ensure that student learning takes place in schools. We noticed that education quality in the region may not be threatened by lack of resources – as commonly perceived – given that education expenditure (as percentage of GDP) has been close to the OECD average (4.54% in our sample as compared to 4.8% the OECD average). Thus, some other governance arrangements, such as missing or malfunctioning accountability links ("[lack of] citizen capacity to demand and obtain better service delivery, either directly from providers or through their elected representatives and civic organizations") are the ones negatively impacting education result, as PISA results indicate that children in SE Europe score lower than their OECD peers by approximately 15%.

A QAS in education resembles a performance management system, with the following sequences flowing chronologically: setting goals -> evaluation -> feeding back evaluation results -> intervention. Within such a multidimensional system, actors (students, teachers, school principals, school boards, local government, national government) interact with each other across a variety of functions (goal setting; performance and evaluation; communication and reporting; resource allocation; autonomy, support and intervention; accountability and consequences) meant to assure high-quality education.

In general in SE Europe, the mode of delivery/instructional vision in education has remained that of "managed instruction" – schools act as implementation agencies for the policies centrally mandated by the state, with the central government assuming the entire responsibility for ensuring the quality of education. In the first stage of our research, we looked strictly at how quality assurance arrangements function "on paper". We came to the conclusion that in all countries in the sample, when it comes to goal setting, the concentration of "powers" rests with the national level (via iterative interactions between the ministries for education and specialized agencies in charge with quality assurance), while evaluation and feedback is a split function between national and subnational/local levels. In general, the only actors in the system for which clear performance goals and standards are set (their formulation varying greatly from country to country) and for which a relatively clear evaluation process is envisaged are students; very worryingly, for teachers goals refer to formal requirements only, not to outcomes. Evaluation processes vary widely from country to country and for principals there are no performance standards per se in the region. The communication and reporting function of a QAS is poorly represented even "on paper", with no benchmarking between schools and with no clear channels through which beneficiaries can be informed about actors' performance, except the individual performance of students.

The most alarming conclusion we reached is that the final policy goal of intervention in case of high/low performance of either actor in the system (student, teacher, principal, etc.) is seemingly absent in QASs, even "on paper". A QAS cannot function unless the "quality loop" is closed, i.e. unless tailored intervention (punishing the laggards, rewarding the achievers, etc.) occurs effectively whenever conclusions on actor performance deem it necessary.

We also examined two important background variables – privatization and decentralization – and concluded that privatization, despite having impacted public service delivery in many other sectors in the region, has left the education sector largely untouched. The decentralized pathway on the other hand has been similar throughout the region, with some early starters and some latecomers. Firstly, horizontal decentralization took place, with autonomous and/or advisory institutions in charge with quality assurance being centrally created. Secondly, deconcentration occurred, with regional branches of national bodies performing a variety of tasks at subnational level. More genuine decentralization actions comprised fiscal decentralization, with local authorities assuming responsibility for the construction and maintenance of school buildings; in some cases even salary disbursement was transferred to the local level, although the national salary grid stayed in place (except Bulgaria, that adopted the delegated budget system).

School boards were introduced in almost all countries in the region, but even on paper their scope of action has remained either weak or poorly specified. Historical centralization/decentralization patterns persisted – e.g. school autonomy in Slovenia, most likely responsible for the country's better education outcomes compared to the regional average, is largely attributable to Slovenia's past administrative division. In the second stage of our research, we went beyond the desk-review of legal and institutional arrangements, and interviewed over 50 stakeholders to find out how QASs really function and, most importantly, how they respond to a set of "real needs" of beneficiaries. We defined these "real needs"/key competences as being communication in mother

tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematic competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression, early school leaving, equal access for all socioeconomic groups, teacher training, parent participation.

We quantified how QASs take these needs into account, procedurally, in each of their functions and built an index of "QAS effectiveness". Bulgaria and Macedonia seem to score highest, with Albania and Serbia being the laggards. The real needs which directly impact students' social skills and real-life competences are those that QASs integrate least in their functions and workings: learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, digital competence. Also, there are no clear goals, standards, measurement and reporting processes or consequences for parent participation, a prerequisite for increased accountability and relevance of educational processes. Communication in mother tongue and mathematics remain instead those aspects on which QASs focus.

Overall, the idea persists among service providers that they indeed should and do account for their actions much rather to the administration (ministry, and foremost inspectorates) than to parents/ students. At the same time, parents (i.e. clients) have neither the mindset nor the proper mechanisms to affect broader educational processes; their concern remains the achievement of their individual child(ren) and when unsatisfied with education outcomes, they resort to individual defensive mechanism (i.e. moving the child to another school, sometimes by "bending" existing norms for student distribution in schools).

Based on these multiple findings, we drew policy recommendations for each country in the sample. Common recommendations include: closing the QAS loop by having real accountability/performance-based consequences; school boards must be made more effective, by an increase in their powers; develop the means to incentivize parent participation in school life; strengthen the capacity of local municipalities to address education issues and not act simply as money disbursers; develop mechanisms to expose actors to a truly objective external assessment; rethink the system for advancement, professional development and payment of teachers; communicate already collected performance data to parents and the wider public transparently and in a user-friendly format; include in the QAS frameworks those "real needs" truly relevant for students' social integration.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Framework of the Project

Accountability and Quality

Quality is one of the main concerns that the sector of basic education in South Eastern Europe (SEE) is raising. "While almost all students reach the last grade of primary school (more than 98% in most countries with data available), international student assessment studies such as PIRLS, TIMSS and PISA show that a gap exists in some countries between the number of students graduating and those among them mastering a minimum set of cognitive skills" (UNESCO, 2005). Not all countries in the sample participated at all past decade editions of PISA, but the trend obviously shows that education quality in SEE is lower than in OECD countries, the average score in maths, reading and science for the countries in our sample being approximately 15% lower than the OECD average.

We start from the assumption that education quality is threatened not by the lack of resources, but from service delivery failures. In fact, available evidence from the seven countries in our sample (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Slovenia) indicate that education expenditure (as percentage of GDP) has been close to the OECD average. Education spending in OECD countries, in 2010, was 4.8% of GDP (Source: World Bank, 2011). In our sample the average in 2009 (for which data exists for all countries) has been 4.54% of GDP. However, quality has been low and/or decreasing, as far as international rankings evidence.

The concept of "accountability" represents an element of governance which we consider to be directly responsible for the aforementioned service delivery failure. The operational definition for "accountability", employed in the present study has been the one in the 2004 World Development Report: "the capacity of citizens to demand and obtain better service delivery, either directly from providers or through their elected representatives and civic organizations". In this sense, one should examine the accountability of providers to both their supervisors and to their clients (i.e. students/ parents). But what is quality of education? As literature points out, it might be: "(1) the compliance to certain standards, (2) the compliance to criteria that are fixed in a contract, and (3) the satisfaction of the clients" (Rado, 2010). In SEE, because of the entrenchment of centralization, the discourse tends to focus on compliance to centrally-issued standards (educational goals, specific targets and service specifications, including but not restricted to curricula and achievement standards).

However, the two other meanings of education quality should also be adhered to, as "education services that assert their high quality should also respond to the actual expectations of their local environment and the clients". At the same time, contemporary quality assurance systems (QASs) are (or should be) tightly connected with the "learning-outcomes approach", in the sense that high-quality education is less about processes and more about learning, learning pathways and competences (Rado, 2010).

Last but not least we ought to clarify why accountability matters to education quality. Literature points out that each of the interventions with typical potential to increase learning (e.g.: teacher training, curriculum reform, school lunches, etc.) rely on a technocratic approach and often fail, because of disregarding the accountability relations and pressures that work in practice. In other words, "Underlying accountability relationships have the power to shape education outcomes by affecting the level and mix of education inputs that are available in an education system as well as the effectiveness of resource use." (World Bank, 2011).

The Research Concept: What is Quality Assurance in Education?

Definition and measurement of explained variable (educational outcome) and explanatory variable (the Quality Assurance System as a governance element)

We took the Quality Assurance System (QAS) in basic education as the explanatory variable, i.e. an element of governance of public service delivery, for the poor educational outcomes in the region. We defined a QAS as "an institutional system that supports the elaboration, enforcement and evaluation of rules/standards/ methodologies that are meant to lead to a higher quality of education, in terms of learners' outcomes and inclusiveness of the learning process." We focused on the gap between the theoretical construction of a governance setup and its practical application, on observations related to actors' incentives and gaming strategies, as well as on building an index of the effectiveness of a QAS.

But what do we mean by "quality assurance"? Quality assurance in an education system means assuring that there is a comprehensive governance and institutional framework through which governments can ensure student learning takes place in school", concludes the SABER (System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results) methodology of the World Bank. Further elements that shape quality assurance are: a clear, coherent vision of learning, performance goals, "rules that guide the actions of participants in an education system",

Table 1. The functioning of a quality assurance system in basic education

FUNCTIONS	PARTICIPANTS
• Setting goals (national curricula, standards, actual development goals) • Performance evaluation • Communication and reporting (in general of performance evaluation to broader public) • Resource allocation • Autonomy, support, intervention • Accountability & consequences	• Students • Teachers • School leaders/ Principals • School Boards • Local Government • National Government

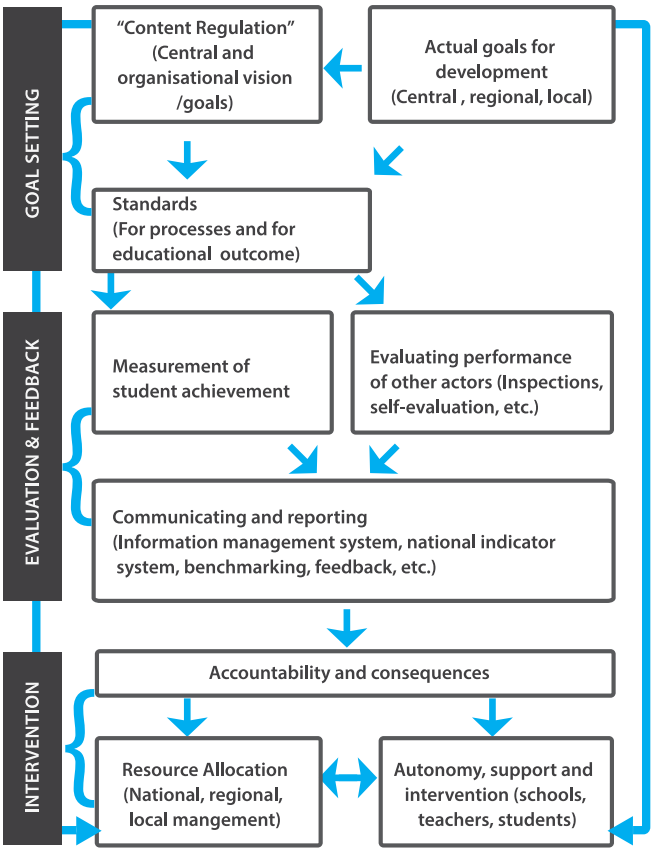
Source: own interpretation of SABER World Bank methodology and Peter Rado's scheme (Rado, 2009).

delineation of resource management and coordination of different functions of different institutions (SABER).
To understand more precisely what a QAS is, we need to understand what a QAS does. Seen in a very schematic perspective, a QAS juxtaposes a set of actors over a set of functions (meant, ultimately, to ensure high quality education). Within a QAS, actors interact with each other during each function, and functions in turn stem chronologically one from another. Basically, we have a holistic approach to QAS in education, noticing the resemblance between what we call a QAS and a performance management system, in the sense the following sequences flow chronologically, in a circular frame: setting goals -> evaluation -> feeding back evaluation results -> intervention. Communication processes and accountability relationships occur between actors when they perform each of these functions and when the transition from one function to the other is made. To a greater or lesser extent, all countries in South Eastern Europe have put such a quality assurance system in place for several years now. However, educational results have been disappointing. Why has this been the case? Are these systems (mis)constructed? In what sense?

Theoretical limitations

As a general theoretical framework, we have applied the principal - agent and accountability theories[1]. However, we have to acknowledge the difficulty of applying these concepts to education, where agents respond to multiple principals (e.g.: teachers as agents respond to parents, principals, school boards; school boards in turn can be seen as agents responding to local government and central government, and so on) and where one cannot systematically measure what goes on behind closed classroom doors. Given the latter, it is difficult to ascertain what leads to high quality education (you are not measuring number of road kilometers built or the chemical composition of water provided by the municipality to the citizens), as you are trying to explore "soft relationships" that, in the end, shape a child's future. At the same time, it has been pointed out in numerous studies, pupils' results in standardized tests are one measure, but not necessarily the only or the best one for measuring educational outcome. PISA tests have been criticised for several reasons. "Learning to the test" behaviour has been suspected by scholars in China (Zhao, 2012), while in general PISA is accused of "governing the

figure 1



1 In any type of service delivery system, problems arise between principals and agents because the latter have objectives of their own and principals have difficulties in observing some aspects of their performance and in enforcing their demands; for broader insights into the economic theory of the principal agent dilemma, please see, among others, Besley and Gathak (2003), Dixit (2002); Holmstrom and Milgrom (1991);

Long and short routes of accountability

If we look at the Long and Short Routes of Accountability in the 2004 World Development Report within the context of education, our starting assumption has been that the QASs in SE Europe focus mostly on the compact between the state and the providers, with citizens/ clients not being fully able to exercise their voice towards the state and/ or their client power towards providers. Figure2 below shows how we position the "hard core" of the quality assurance framework within the broader framework of accountability relations.

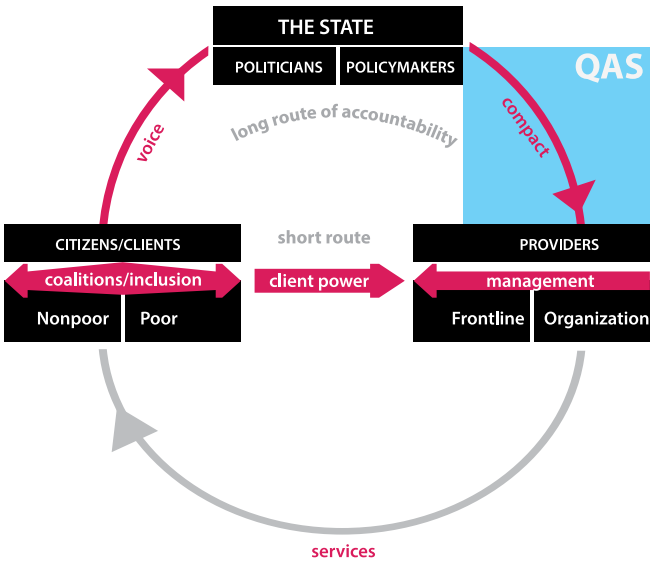


Figure 2. The functioning of a fully-fledged QAS in basic education
Source: GDNET Concept Note, Own Interpretation

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

Research questions

We tried to answer the following research questions:

What are the main similarities and the main differences between the institutional setup of the quality assurance systems in the countries in the sample? Is there a SE European "blueprint"?

To what extent are the quality assurance systems for basic education (grades 1-8/9) in the 7 SEE countries in the sample answering to the "real needs" of education's main beneficiaries (i.e. pupils)? Through which of their functions are they addressing these needs?

What are the accountability links between the main actors in the 7 quality assurance systems under scrutiny that are either missing or inefficient, allowing thus for low quality education to be delivered?

What is the incentive system (among pupils, teachers, principals, policy-makers) that the quality assurance system is creating in the countries under scrutiny?

(for Romania and Macedonia) How and to what extent are the theoretical "promises" of the quality assurance systems implemented in practice? How do these systems resonate with actors in the field, especially parents, teachers, principals and local government representatives in school boards?

How should we transform the governance systems in quality assurance in basic education to achieve high quality education for all socioeconomic groups?

The case study method

We have chosen the case study method from the very beginning of our research. Our starting point was the "most similar cases - most different outcomes" method. We chose similar cases (geographical location, impact of Europeanization, communist legacy, post-transition/ post-conflict status, decentralization and quality assurance reforms in education starting off relatively simultaneous, high access vs. low quality paradigm despite gradual increase of education spending, low ability to fight corruption), with variance across outcome (PISA results, with Slovenia being a front runner; It seems to be the regional outlier, in terms of high results in tests; however, this had less to do, as our research indicated, with a well-performing QAS than with a national policy of scoring high in international standardized tests) and mediating factors (different stages of quality assurance & decentralization policy reforms, different characteristics of vulnerable groups).

Linking governance issues to outcomes: methodological limitations

We have thought of the outcome "quality education" as linked to the set of relationships and interactions between actors that a QAS creates. Six basic actors (students, teachers, principals, school boards/schools, local governments and national governments) interact with each other over a variety of functions (goal setting; performance evaluation; communication and reporting; resource allocation; autonomy, support, intervention; accountability and consequences) meant to assure high quality education. This multi-dimensional, multi-functional interaction forms the element of governance called QAS (see Table 1).

We have avoided drawing a direct link between the QAS and international standardized tests results as an outcome. First and foremost, the hesitation was procedural: not all countries in the sample had participated in the last three editions of the PISA/ TIMMS test.

Secondly, our original concern was why the QASs - which all countries have set up - are failing to do their job in SEE. More broadly, we tried to explore how these QASs function in terms of reaching their stated aims and objectives and in terms of effectiveness. An approach based on a procedural analysis of effectiveness and "real needs" replaced the classical paradigm A -> B (the higher A => the higher B).

As with any qualitative method, several limitations are inherent. Firstly, results cannot be generalized beyond the seven case studies we have scrutinized, but important policy lessons may be learnt for contexts struggling with education reforms. Secondly, there is no direct causation between a certain type of QAS system and better learning outcomes - spuriousness is a factor that can bias the explanation of what causes good learning outcomes and the model was not built as to factor in all possible factors that could affect learning outcomes (e.g.: GDP/ capita, etc.).

Thirdly, we did not have a high enough number of observations for the so-called dependent variable (i.e. learning outcomes) in all countries in the sample, as some countries did not participate in all latest three editions of the PISA test (a comparable indicator for the dependent variable of learning outcomes). At the same time, the process of building and establishing a QAS is a lengthy one and it cannot be ascertained with too much clarity at which point in time it has been finalized in any of the member states.

At the same time, in the education field, it takes a long time for reforms to impact results/ learning outcomes. As a result, the time order condition cannot be satisfied (e.g.: Slovenia's efficient QAS from what year determined Slovenia to be a high-achiever in the 2009 PISA test?).

Data collection

In the first stage of the research, National Experts performed mostly a descriptive exercise, by reviewing secondary literature and primary sources (laws, bylaws, school development plans, school self-evaluation and evaluation templates, etc.) to identify the main actors that form the quality assurance system, which actor performs which function and to what extent, and what are the main rules and regulations underpinning their activities, etc.
The objective has been as well to describe how the accountability/ reporting chain looks "on paper" in each of the educational systems in the sample. As a result of this baseline review, we were able to describe the level of decentralization in each educational system under scrutiny, alongside the instructional vision (if there is one) the system exhibits.

In the second stage of the research, National Experts were asked to go beyond the desk-review and conduct in-depth interviews with at least eight stakeholders/country to assess in a more critical manner, how these systems really function. Starting off from 13 "real needs" students enrolled in basic education in our region seem to have, according to international indicators and evaluations, National Experts explored how and to what extent quality assurance systems take these needs into account, procedurally, in each of their functions (goal setting, standard setting, measuring achievement of students, measuring achievement of other actors, communication and reporting, accountability and consequences, support and intervention).

The first "real needs" we explored form the area "quality of student achievements". It is actually composed of eight key competencies, defined by the European Union as essential for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment (Source: Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning). We believe this perspective can be further justified through the effect of Europeanization across the region, as all states in the sample have been making efforts to adhere to the European acquis, including in the field of education.

The education paradigm has changed dramatically in the last couple of years and specialists now agree that high achievement in reading, mathematics or sciences, although important, is not necessarily tantamount to high quality education. The eight key competencies/real needs are:

1. **communication in the mother tongue**
2. **communication in foreign languages**
3. **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**
4. **digital competence**
5. **learning to learn**
6. **social and civic competences**
7. **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship**
8. **cultural awareness and expression**

The second area of "real needs" we have explored is related to "access, progress and completion", as we believe that quality assurance systems should take into account not only student achievement, but also socioeconomic/ inclusiveness gaps, which are mostly related to access and completion. In this sense, the real needs we will be assessing are:

9. **school dropout/ early school leaving**
10. **equal access for all socioeconomic groups**

Some other "real needs" we focused on, identified by the European Commission in recent policy-relevant documents (e.g.: European Report on the Quality of School Education. Sixteen Quality Indicators, Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2000) are:

11. **education and training of teachers**
12. **parent participation**
13. **expenditure per student**

In other words, we built an index of the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems in South Eastern Europe starting from the real needs felt by clients (as identified by general secondary data, policy documents, etc.) and from their incorporation - or lack thereof - in the architecture of these QASs. In building the index, we repeated the method for all thirteen real needs identified above. Based on in-depth interviews, National Experts had to fill in a questionnaire in order to build this index.

The process below is an illustration for how the QAS takes into account the need "communication in mother tongue".

1. Are there goals (and at what level) for student achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue"?
2. Are there standards (and at what level) for student achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue"?
3. Is student achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue" measured?
4. Are other actors in the system evaluated for students' performance in the area "communication in mother tongue"?
5. Is student achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue" communicated and reported?
6. Is there an accountability and consequence system in place to reward/ punish achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue"?
7. Is resource allocation re-done according to achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue"?
8. Is there a support and intervention system in place for achievement in the area "communication in mother tongue"?

For each of the above questions, National Experts described qualitatively the situation on the ground in each country in the sample, and were asked to assign the following scores:

- 2 for a fully-fledged process of goal-setting/ measurement/ intervention, etc.
- 1 for a partial process of goal-setting/ measurement/ intervention, etc.
- 0 for no process of goal-setting/ measurement/ intervention, etc.

Afterwards, in a descriptive exercise, "the black box" of accountability links among actors has been qualitatively unpacked for all countries in the sample.

In the end, the aggregated scores for all thirteen "real needs" allowed us to produce overall country scores, which allowed us to place countries on a continuum describing the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems.

The third step of our research has been the Implementation Review (Romania & Macedonia) - because of budgetary constraints limitations, we had to restrict ourselves to only two countries in which we performed implementation reviews.

Experts went to six schools in each country and performed a total of 36 interviews/ country with teachers, parents, inspectors, principals and educators. The aim of this effort was to figure out whether, how and to what extent actors on the ground understand the requirements of a QAS, its rationale, and their own role in the whole system. We wanted to test the belief of public policy practitioners that one of the greatest weaknesses of public policies is poor implementation. The schools were selected based on the following variables: student achievement (one high achieving school in the city, one low achieving one), ethnicity (one multi-ethnic school, one without ethnic minorities), geography (one village school, one city school).

The interview guide was the same in all schools, for all actors and questions in the following areas were asked: how actors perceive quality standards, if quality standards are known to actors on the ground, how principals report data for evaluation, who elaborates the report on school performance in reality, corruption/ integrity, thoroughness of school inspections, qualification of inspectors, how worksheets are being filled in, if syllabi are being respected, power relationships in the school board, parental involvement in schools, etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW: SKETCHING THE CONTEXT

The Global Development Network Sectoral Paper on Education

By trying to understand how a QAS functions, we have touched upon a series of aspects highlighted in the Global Development Network Sectoral Paper on Education (Balu, Patrinos, Vegas, 2009), that formed the theoretical backbone of the entire global research programme that this project has been a part of.

> by basic education, we understood primary and lower secondary education (grades 1 to 8/ 9, with variance across countries in the sample).

> though not core part of our research, we have examined in the Implementation Review the educational opportunities (high quality education for all) offered to children from poor and disadvantaged families in Romania and Macedonia).

> we focused more on education quality than on equity/ access as enrollment remains relatively high in SEE, because of the communist legacy of compulsory schooling.

> one point from the GDN Sectoral Paper was making which we tried to investigate was that it may be easier to align incentives between schools and their respective communities (e.g.: through the participation of the local community in school boards) than between teachers/ principals and policymakers; one assumption which is, at least partially, sustained by our research is that these efforts at closer alignment of incentives with the local community do not work because in most cases decentralization is incomplete (the quality assurance system as a construct is incomplete, we will argue).

> starting from one conclusion of the Sectoral Paper increasingly advocated by international foundations (e.g: the Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany), namely that high quality education starts off with well-prepared and motivated teachers, we examined existing teacher training and professional development programmes and also the existence (or lack thereof, as our research has concluded) of incentives to attract and reward effective teaching.

> the Sectoral Paper concludes that "cross-country evidence shows that greater school autonomy over personnel management and process decisions appear to be related to higher student performance"; in the case of our research, we cannot, methodologically, (because of our small-n and our qualitative model) assert causation between greater accountability/school autonomy and student outcome; however, there is evidence that the highest performer in the sample (Slovenia) is associated with a less centralized, more school-focused QAS.

Country by country literature review

A comprehensive literature review[1] of major sectoral reports and journal articles was made for each country in the sample.

Albania. When it comes to basic education, the focus of the discourse and reforms is on physical education infrastructure (which does not meet EU standards), and on the need for teaching improvement and curricula review (Ministry of Education and Science, 2008). As everywhere in the region, the net basic education school enrolment ratio is high, yet proxies for quality (such as completion and dropout rates) are disappointing - only 90% of enrolled students complete the four years of compulsory primary school (UNICEF, 2011). The average ratio is 1:18, the highest in CE Europe. Programmes for improving quality exist only on a pilot basis – e.g.: the joint programme Ministry of Education – UNICEF to stimulate reading, rolled out in only 700 out of a total of 4771 schools.

Bulgaria. The context exhibits somewhat different challenges, among which the World Bank identifies increasing participation in secondary education and increasing the quality and relevance of skills, in a cost effective manner (World Bank 2006). Bulgaria's cornerstone reform was in the field of basic education financing. Delegated budgets were introduced in 2008. Instead of fixed "per school" financing, the delegated budget provides "per student" financing. In this way schools compete to attract students. Delegated budgets have been part of a wider set of decentralization and school autonomy reforms, within the general strategy of moving towards a results-oriented educational system instead of a resource-oriented one. Recent reviews point out that the "sweeping decentralization reforms" from 2007 led to impressive efficiency. Financial optimization and adjustment to demographic trends was achieved through as many as 340 school closures and 4807 teacher lay-offs (33% of total teaching force). However, accountability relations, especially persistently low parent participation remain a key concern (Danchev, Patrinos, et al, 2011). A new law giving wider powers to parent-inclusive school boards was expecting to change this starting mid-2012. Interestingly, there is no evidence whether the reform improved outcomes.

Romania. Existing literature in the case of Romania places great emphasis on quality assurance and school dropout/ early school leaving. The QAS operates rather like a "top – down" approach based on standards and procedures from European practice, as pre-requisites for a bottom-up approach are scarce. QAS implementation in practice remains low, and authors believe this is because of insufficient knowledge by stakeholders of standards involved, low participation of parents and teachers, low level of decentralization (Kiss & Fejes, 2010). The overall drop-out rate

1 Nine National Experts reviewed a total of 44 such documents to offer a high-level overview of what national decision-makers and international experts agree to as being key features and challenges of educational systems in the region;

is 4.3% (and as high as 6.7% for Roma children), yet studies point out that the legislative setup uses two alternative definitions for this concept, both of them deficient in terms of measurement capacity (Duminica & Ivasiuc, 2010).

Slovenia. Basic education comprises a 9-year cycle, and is finalized when the pupil obtains a final certificate, with grades in compulsory subjects throughout the educational cycle and with the results of an external assessment. More importantly, Slovenia is a constant participant in international examinations (TIMSS, CIVED/ICCS, PIRLS, and PISA), as a part of national educational policy. Moreover, as research indicates, iterative participation in international testing has had an influence in national policy-making: changes in curriculum, changes in teacher training, behavioural changes, etc. (Klemenčič, 2010).

Macedonia. Macedonia is greatly lagging behind the set targets in all five key benchmarks set up under the Education and Training (E&T) 2010 Work programme of the EU, thus having significantly higher number of early school leavers, lower achievement in reading literacy, lower upper secondary attainment, lower number of math and science graduates and lower participation in lifelong learning compared to the set benchmarks for 2010, as well as compared to the EU-27 countries' progress. Numerous programs have been implemented in the past decade with regards to changing teaching methods, computerization of schools and a complete revision of the QAS; but their effects are rather inconsistent.

Montenegro. According to national strategies for the development of the education sector, key areas of improvement for Montenegro over the next five years are the improvement of school infrastructure (as a precondition for the improvement of the quality of education), improvement of the professional capacity of teachers, securing monitoring of the quality of the teaching process, improving the quality of teaching materials (e.g.: text-books) and, of course, as other countries in the region, improving pupils' results in knowledge and skills.

Serbia. The last systemic National Report of the Republic of Serbia on the current state of affairs in education was completed in 2008, after broad cross-sectoral consultations. It underlined key changes between 2000 and 2008, such as the stable growth of investment in education (from 2.7% in 2001 to 3.7% GDP in 2007), salary growth and investment in school refurbishment, but also development of education policy. Main areas of improvement remain the accessibility of education, including for vulnerable groups, prevention of discrimination, development of vocational training, and the establishment of a system of quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation.

Sector institutions and modes of delivery

No QAS functions in a vacuum. One needs to take a look at the bigger picture: at the instructional vision the government is promoting. National Experts in this research project, starting from field evidence and from a World Bank methodology, have matched the country in the sample they were examining with a mode of delivery/ instructional vision. Typologies might differ, but depending on the type of relationship created between the schools and the state, one can fit a QAS in one of four so-called "instructional visions"

Limited state: In this vision, the role of the central government is limited to a set of minimum key functions (e.g.: establishing operation requirements and reporting standards, financing schools, etc.). Schools are encouraged to compete with one another and citizens have freedom in opening up schools as long as they meet minimum requirements. The focus is on choice, as a mode of public service delivery.

Quality Contracts: In this vision, the government actively influences the quantity, quality and distribution of schools by granting and revoking school licences. However, schools exercise discretion over instructional model and evaluation methodologies. Briefly put, it is about "managing quality through licensing".

Differentiated Instruction: In this vision, governments intervene in schools depending on their performance (tailored support services for schools lagging behind). High-performing schools receive greater autonomy than low-performing schools

Managed Instruction: Also called "prescribing and monitoring for excellence", this vision entails that schools act as implementation agencies for the policies centrally mandated by the state. In this mode of delivery, the central government assumes entire responsibility for ensuring the quality of education, performing all the duties it would perform under a differentiated instruction model, but also defining a single statutory instructional model.

Table 2 crosstabs the responsibilities between institutions and schools with their QAS profiles. It should be mentioned that, as international benchmarking shows, there is no "good" or "bad" QAS profile, in the sense for instance that managed instruction leads to worse learning outcomes than quality contracts, for instance. The question is whether the institutions within the larger educational system (central, subnational, local or school-based) are effectively carrying out policy actions that lead to the accomplishment of system-based quality assurance goals. According to the World Bank SABER methodology, these four goals are: (1) to define a clear, shared learning vision and a strategy to accomplish it; (2) to align the policies and regulatory frameworks of an education system toward meeting the vision; (3) to monitor the implementation of the strategy to meet the learning vision, as well as the performance of the various participants in the system; (4) to ensure that performance objectives are met through accountability and support mechanisms.

Before discussing the region's broader institutional/

governance setting, it is important to take a look at the profiles of countries in the sample in terms of the levels of governance (national/subnational/local) where the policy goals and actions for system-wide quality assurance are being fulfilled. Based on the functions a QAS is supposed to perform (see Table 3), we have broken down each of the three large policy goals (goal setting/ evaluation and feedback/ intervention) into more concrete policy actions, with the purpose of identifying at which level these actions take place.

A methodological caveat should be mentioned at this point: this cross-country comparative assessment is based on data collected by National Experts as part of the Baseline Review (see Methodology) of Quality Assurance Systems in the region; therefore, it reflects a de jure situation/ arrangements as they look on paper. Broken accountability links and misfunctioning communication flows will be presented/ identified in the second stage of the research.

Table 2. Crosstab between SQA profiles and Levels of Government

Level of Government	MI	DI	MI (DI)	MI (QC)	MC	MC	DI
Central							
Sub-national			N/A				N/A
Local							
School							
	Albania	Bulgaria	Macedonia	Montenegrot	Romania	Serbia	Slovenia

	More responsibility over SQA actions
	Less responsibility over SQA actions
	Little responsibility over SQA actions

DI = Differentiated Instruction; MI = Managed Instruction; QC = Quality Contracts

Some preliminary conclusions that can be drawn about the setup and functioning of QASs, seen as an element of governance, in the region, comprise the following:

> when it comes to goal setting, the concentration of "power" rests with the national level, with some alignment going on at the other levels

> evaluation and feedback seems to be a split competence, with actions such as measurement of student achievement and reporting on performance and results taking place at national level in all countries in the sample, and at subnational/ local level in about half of the countries under scrutiny; the supervision and evaluation of schools is a split competence mostly between national and local/ school level, due in general to the more recent promotion of a culture of school-based self-evaluation; benchmarking is not an action that takes place - not even "in theory" - in all countries.

> the policy goal of intervention, a very important stage in the QAS cycle, does not happen in all countries, which is a very important and at the same time alarming conclusion, as a QAS cycle cannot function unless all functions are fulfilled and reinforced circularly; for instance, broader actions such as "enforcing accountability" are present in all QAS setups, but rewarding of high-achievers/ punishing of laggards, support, autonomy creation, etc. - all these actions are missing in several countries in the sample, meaning that the conclusions derived on actor performance and the implementation of standards do not lead anywhere, to any concrete change/ improvement in the system.

Looking country by country, the following profiles can be drawn:

Table 3. At What Level Are QAS Policy Actions Performed?

Policy Goals	Policy Actions	National	Subnational	Local/school
GOAL SETTING	Setting of central and organisational visions/ goals	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI		RS
	Setting of actual goals for development	AL, BG, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL	MK, RS
	Content and performance standards for student learning	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL	RS
	Standards for educational processes	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL, RO	
	Align teaching and learning inputs to vision and goals	AL, BG, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL, RO	ME, RO, RS
EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK	Measurement of student achievement/ administer student learning assessments	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL	AL, MK, RO, RS
	Evaluate performance of other actors (teachers, principals)	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS	AL, BG, MK, RO	AL, BG, MK, RS, SI
	Supervise and evaluate schools	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS	AL, BG, RO	BG, MK, ME, RS, SI
	Evaluate institutions	AL, BG, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL, RO	RS
	Report on performance and results	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI	AL, BG, RO	AL, ME, RS
	Benchmarking	AL, MK, RO, SI	RO	
	Giving feedback	AL, MK, ME, RO, RS, SI		BG, ME
INTERVENTION	Enforce accountability	AL, BG, MK, ME, RO, RS	AL, BG, RO	BG, SI
	"Reward" the high-achievers/ "punish" the laggards	AL, MK, RO	AL	BG
	Reallocate resources taking into account performance evaluation results	AL, RO	AL	AL
	Support non-performers (schools, teachers, students)	AL, MK, ME, RO		MK
	Create more autonomy for performers	AL, RO, SI		

Albania: The national level and, in some cases, through the sub national institutes, retains major functions and roles in all three policy levels: goal setting, evaluation and feedback and intervention. In the near future the local level is planned to have an increasing role in goal setting and evaluation, as the new Education Strategy aspires to increase the role of local authorities in this area. The subnational level also plays a role, with Regional Education Directorates organizing inspections, implementing regional policies, conducting trainings for teaching staff, appointing teachers, etc. Local administration intervenes mostly through redistribution of funds for maintenance and repairs. Schools themselves are rather passive actors, with the exception of the Evaluation and Feedback policy goals, as they measure student achievement.

Bulgaria: When it comes to Goal Setting, all tasks are performed by central authorities – the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science and its subsidiaries (agencies and directorates). The evaluation and feedback of school performance is, again, primarily executed at central level. In the intervention policy actions, the roles are divided between central government and local authorities only when it comes to municipal schools, but the policy is narrowed to simple budged allocation mechanisms rather than performance based system. The system of delegated budgets is by far the biggest policy innovation in Bulgaria, which forms an integral part of the QAS.

Macedonia: The process of goal setting is mainly managed centrally through setting content and performance standards for student learning and standards for educational processes. However, schools, while required to adhere to the centrally set principles, have the autonomy to devise a plan with more specific goals for development. With regards to the evaluation and feedback, the standardized external and national assessments are being performed centrally by the State Assessment Center; teachers are evaluated though both by central institutions, and by local ones (School Boards and

Local Education Inspectorates). The intervention actions are almost entirely centrally managed.

Montenegro: The level of goal-setting is almost entirely centrally managed (through the ministry and through an expert body - the Council for General Education), with schools having the possibility to intervene in the policy action of aligning teaching and learning inputs to vision and goals, in the sense they can elaborate tailored school-based annual development plans. Evaluation and feedback, as a policy goal, remain driven by central authorities, with the notable exception of school self-evaluation, a process that plays an important role in the whole quality assurance system of Montenegro.

Romania: The analysis in case of Romania is specific from one point of view, at least: in January 2011 the New National Education Law (Law no.1/2011) came into force and this act comes up with substantial modifications to the previous legal framework. The situation of education at the time National Experts conducted their assessment is still overwhelming tributary to the old regulatory framework, in force by 2011. Goal setting is done at national level by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MERYS) and by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (RAQAPE), in a circular process, in which, briefly put, MERYS approves the policy goals and rules, RAQAPE elaborates them. Evaluation and feedback are accomplished at national level, sub-national level and local level. RAQAPE functions as a tool for providing feedback, monitoring and controlling the quality of education in schools but it cannot enforce sanctions on schools. In this process, the role of schools is limited to report an internal evaluation/ self-evaluation of education quality. The new education law passed in 2011 creates the prerequisites for a future broader decentralization of the QAS in education.

Serbia: Central and organizational goals are set by the Ministry, along with the content and performance standards for student learning. These goals are being operationalized on a daily basis in every school through development plans and annual operation plans. External testing exists at the end of primary education; currently in two subject areas - Serbian language and literature and mathematics. Performance evaluation of teachers and principals is done by the Ministry, through its regional offices. Support to schools, as well as the resource allocation may be done both centrally and locally.

Slovenia: Goals and visions are mainly set within the Ministry for Education and Sport and the independent public agency National Educational Institute (NEI). While the role of the ministry is mainly in setting general goals of the education, the NEI for instance develops curricula and syllabi. The National Examinations Center, another independent central agency, evaluates through national standardized tests the performance of students, while all other actors are evaluated and supervised at a local, school-based level.

The following diagrams portray the main QAS institutions in the countries we have examined.

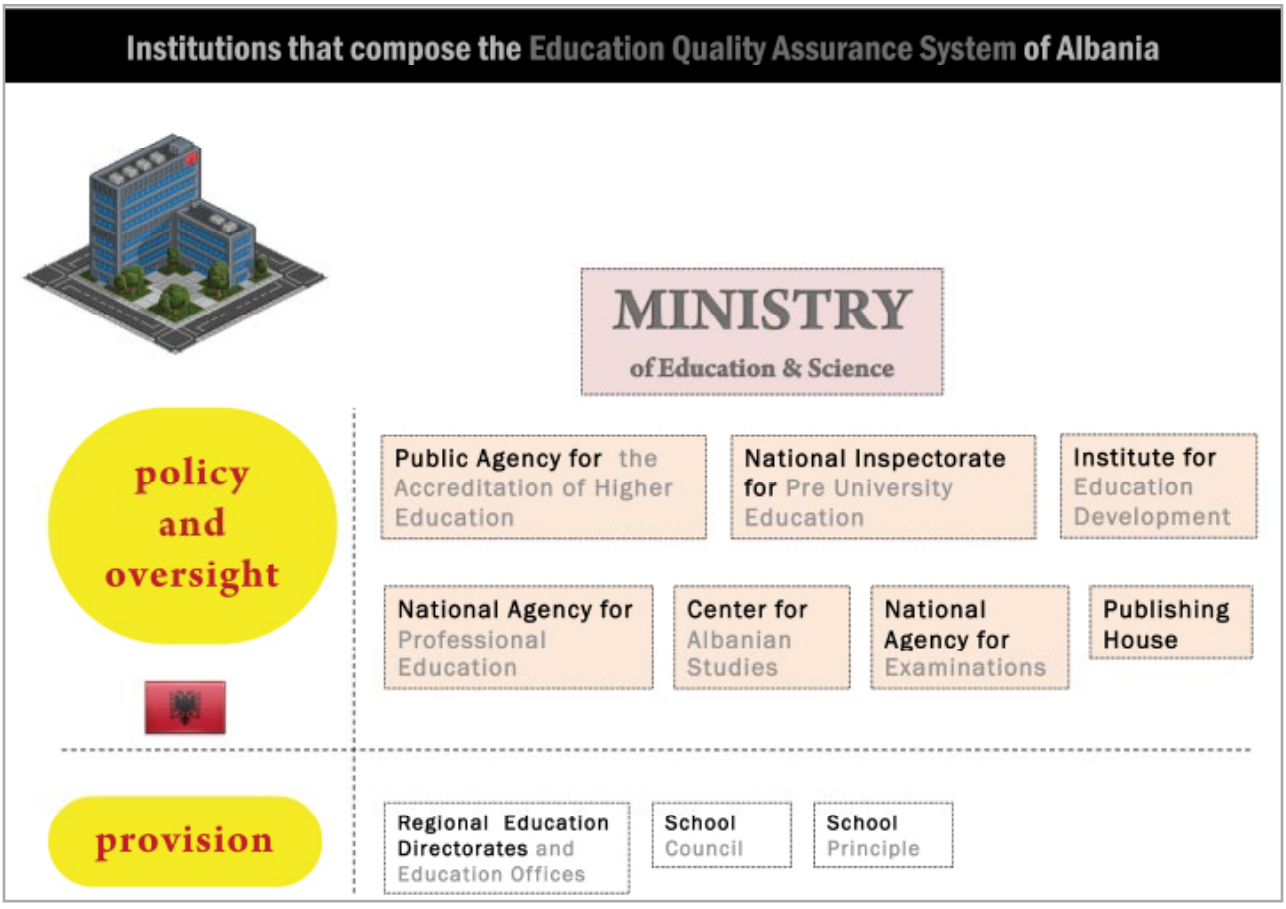


Figure 3. Albania Quality Assurance System

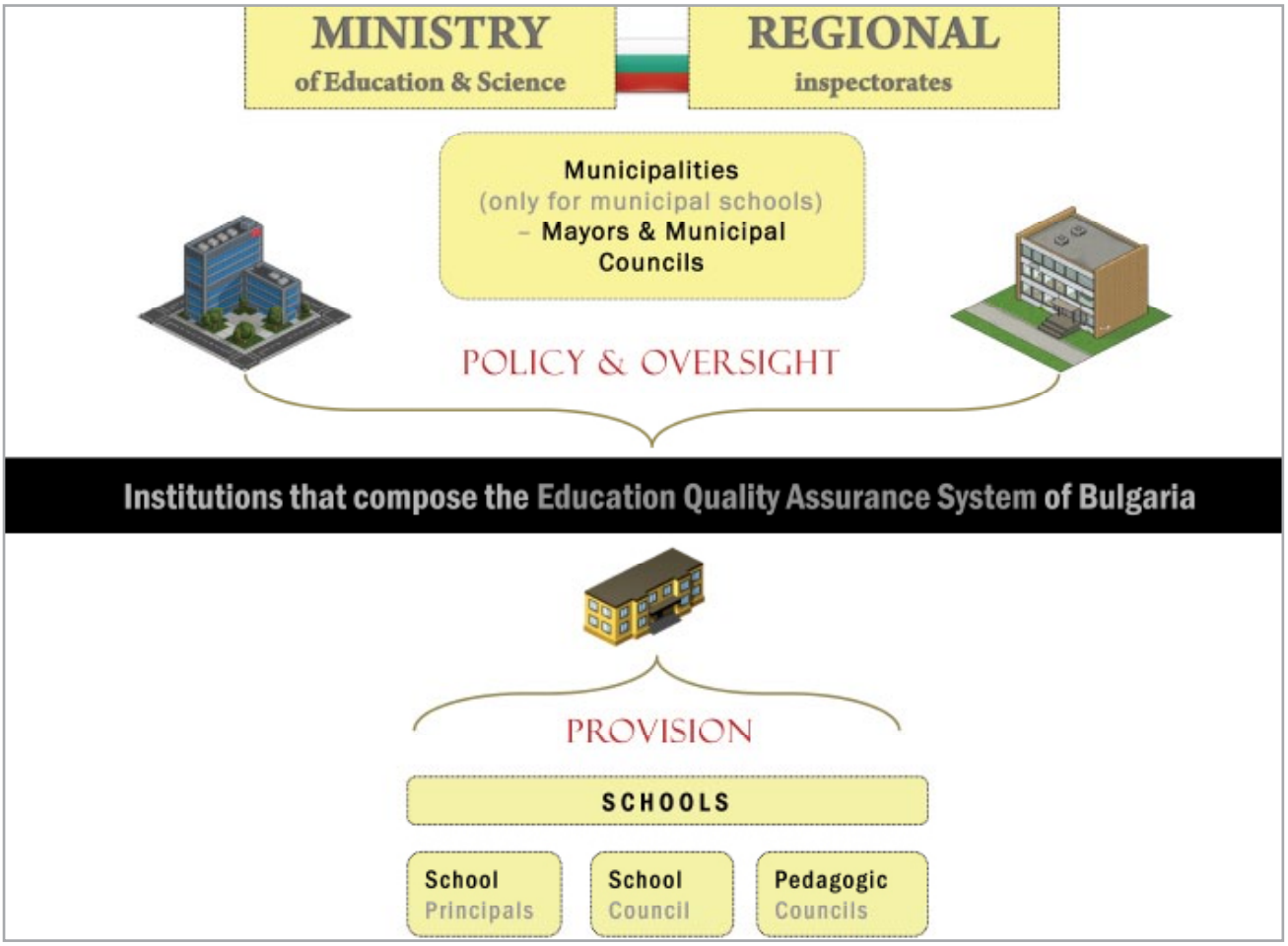


Figure 4. Bulgaria Quality Assurance System

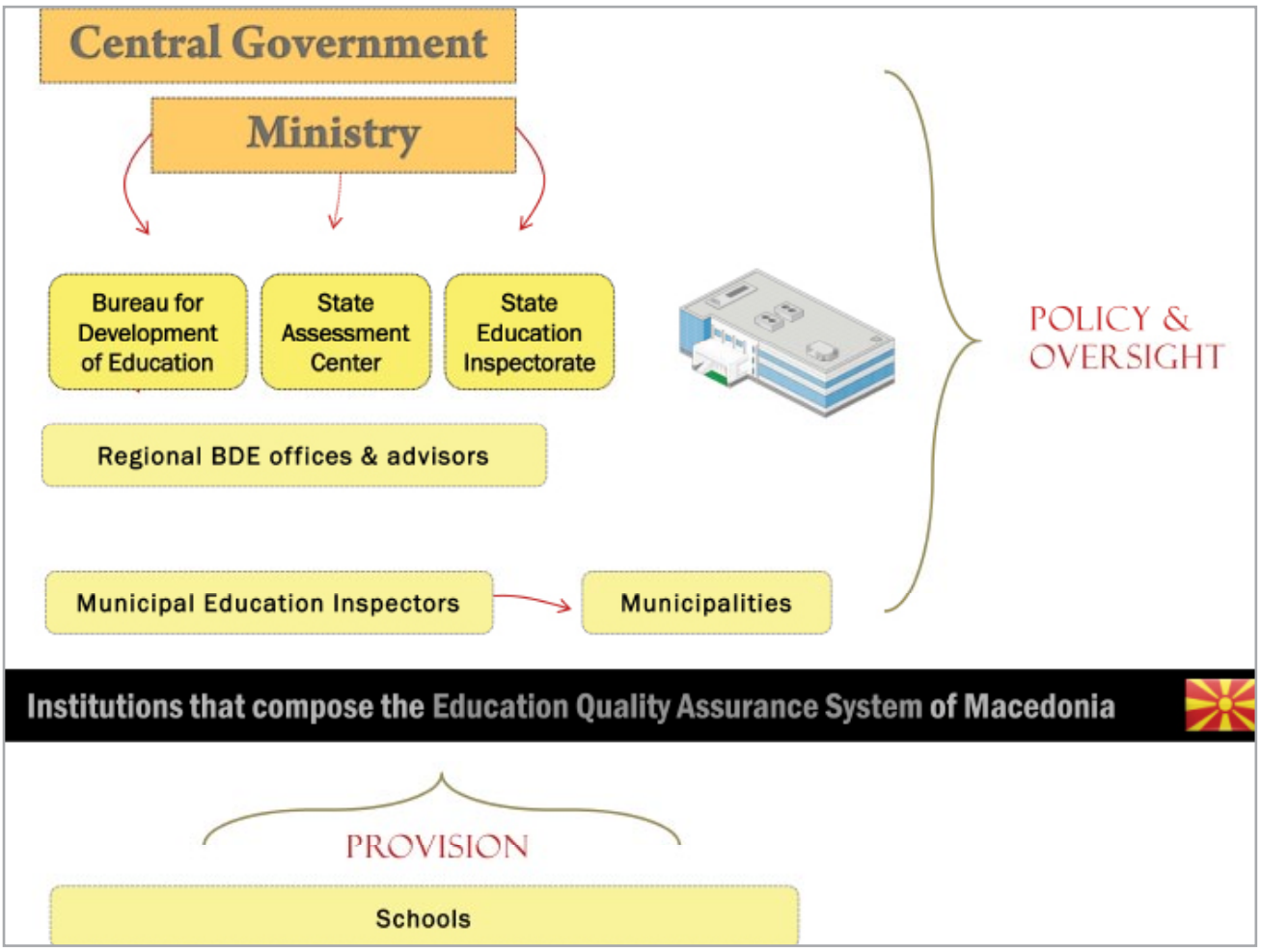


Figure 5. Macedonia Quality Assurance System

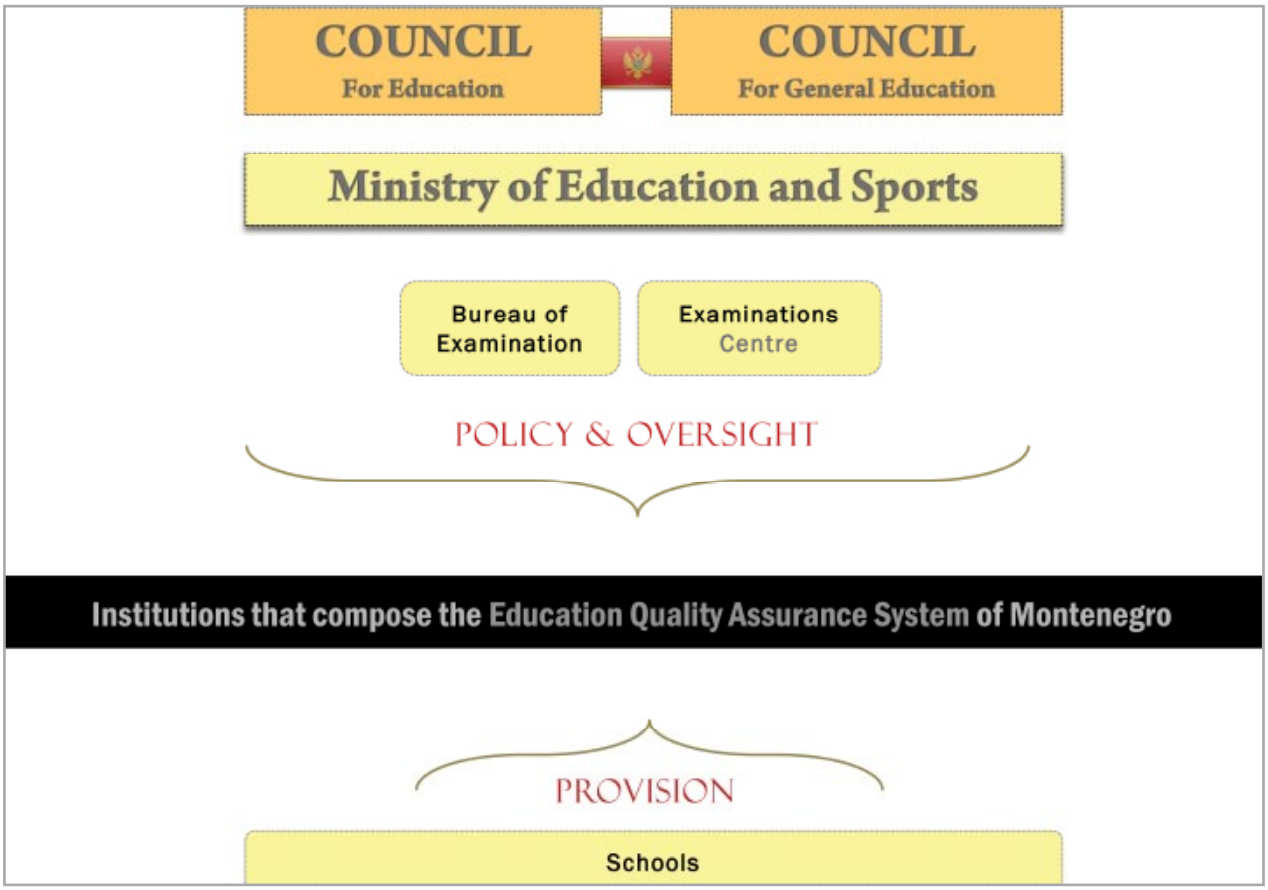


Figure 6. Montenegro Quality Assurance System

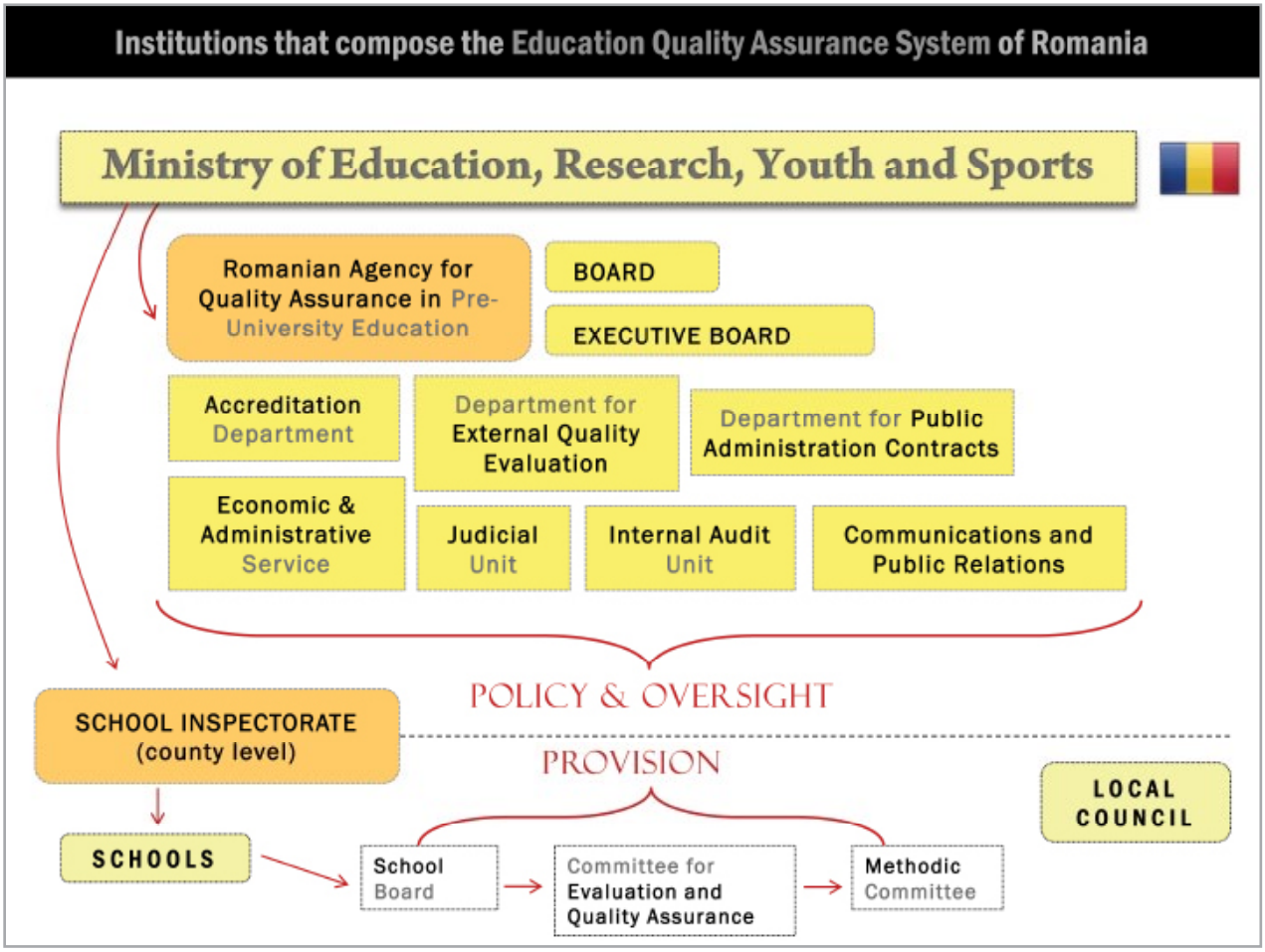


Figure 7. Romania Quality Assurance System

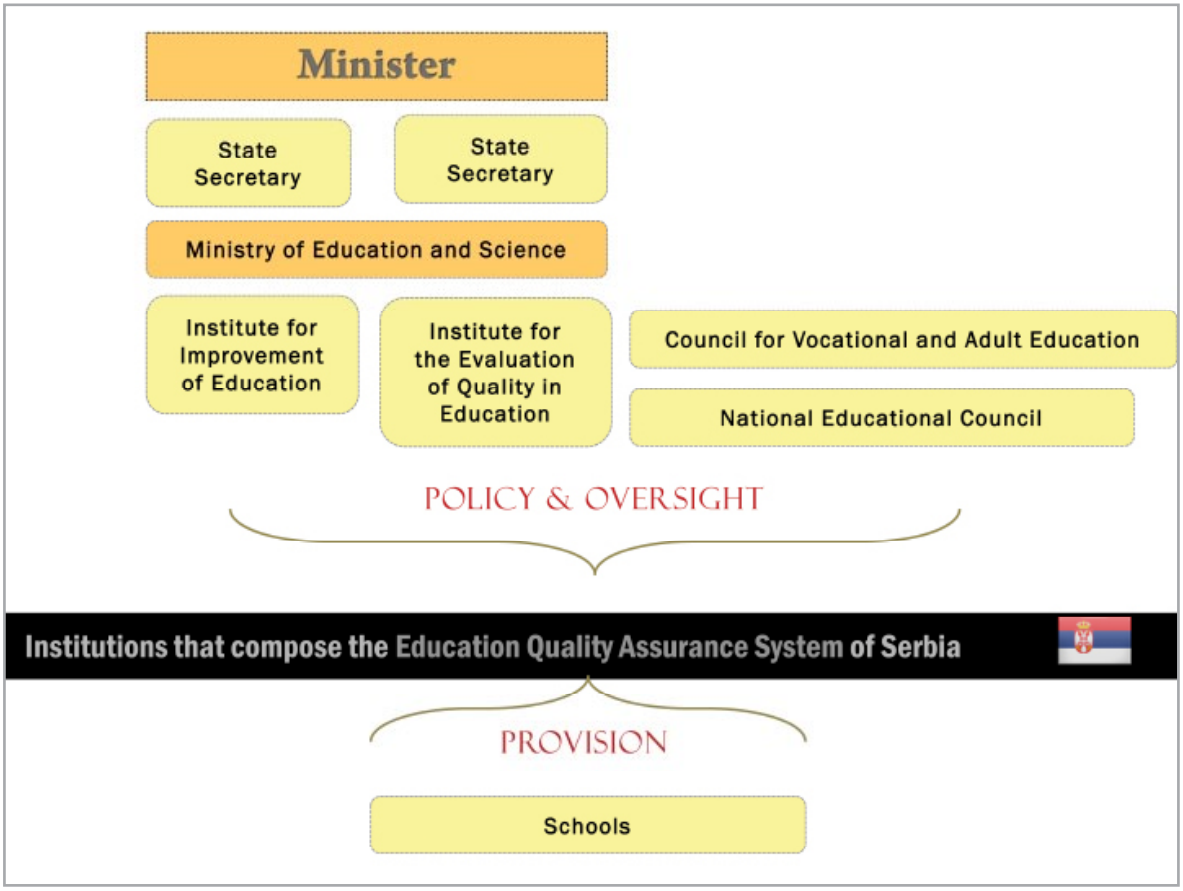


Figure 8. Serbia Quality Assurance System

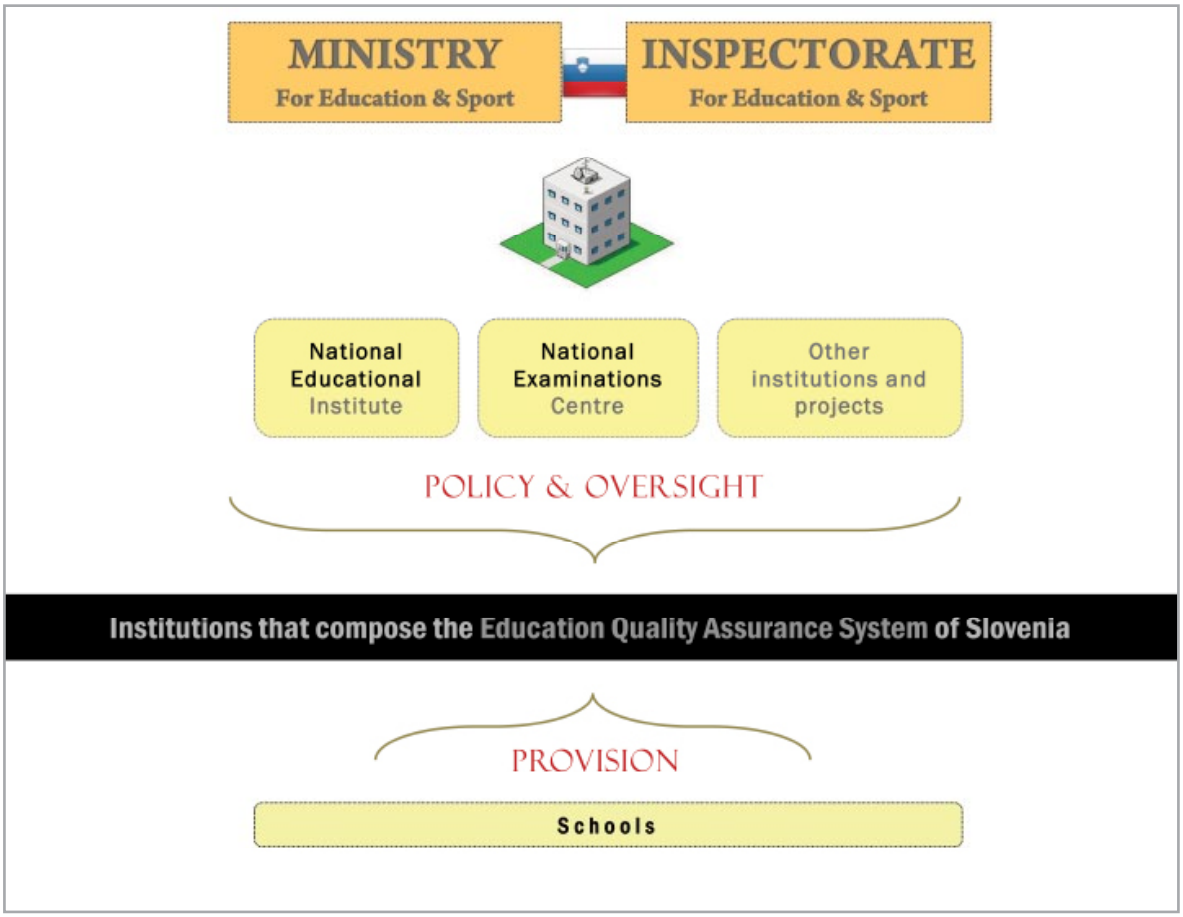


Figure 9. Slovenia Quality Assurance System

The role of information

Information is seen in literature as an essential enabler of accountability. The research team has fitted information (as "communication and reporting") as an essential function of a QAS. We tended to look at information as information provided by the agents (e.g.: service providers/ teachers) to the principals (e.g.: parents), essentially information on performance (of students, teachers, schools, etc.). For this reason, we looked not only at the availability of information, but also at its user friendliness. However, at least two observations should be singled out.

Firstly, in order to identify broken accountability links, one also needs to look at the information flows not working properly internally, within the broader QAS (e.g.: information flows from providers, for instance school principal, not feeding properly decision-making by politicians or policymakers). Secondly, we believe that improving the quantity, reliability and user friendliness of information is "toothless" unless complemented by other measures of citizen empowerment (e.g.: more choice - as a public service delivery mode).

Literature on education reform looks at information as a strategy for strengthening accountability. In this perspective, information can be used in the sense of national-level data spurring debate and motivating change, but also as an instrument to increase accountability at school level. The concrete products resulting from this strategy have been, for instance, school report cards, rankings of schools within a certain geographic area, etc. The main stated demand of such information-centered reform has been to stimulate parental involvement and citizen demand (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos, 2011).

Broader institutional/governance setting

When discussing this topic, we chose two variables: privatization and decentralization. Very interestingly, although it has shaped public service delivery in South Eastern Europe in many sectors, privatization left the educational sector largely untouched.

In the basic typology of privately-managed vs. publicly-managed and privately-financed vs. publicly-financed, no schools in the region are publicly-managed and privately-funded; in Slovenia only, as the outlier in this respect in our sample, there are some publicly-financed and privately-managed schools (about 1% of the total number of basic education schools). If a school has publicly-acknowledge programmes (i.e. their curriculum is compliant with the national standard) and is privately-run, it can receive public financing at the level of 85 % per pupil compared to public schools.

The more common typology - privately-financed and privately-managed - is by far the exception and not the norm in the region. With 4.46% such schools out of the total number of schools in the country, Albania is the absolute frontrunner in the region, followed by Bulgaria (3%). All others have less than 1% privately-financed and privately-managed schools. In Albania, the policy to encourage private basic education has been a deliberate one. One of the main incentives used has been reducing significantly the time period for schools' licence issuance. Both private and public schools in the region need to follow the same curricula and syllabi, with the only notable difference being the level of infrastructure development, which is much higher in the case of private schools. Another aspect is the greater financial freedom in respect to expenditure structure. In general, the student - teacher ratio, an important indicator of client satisfaction, is better in private schools. According to national data, there is no difference in outcome between private and public schools.

Voucher systems are not common in the region, yet most countries are in various stages of their introduction. The most advanced is Slovenia, where the principle "the money follows the student" is well entrenched; the second most advanced seems to be Romania, which introduced, since January 2011, a government-financed per student subsidy that follows the pupil independent of whether she is attending a public or a private school that is accredited. In Bulgaria, there are also on-going plans to introduce the voucher system, yet [still] not present. The lowest degree of openness towards privatization is in Macedonia, where by law there isn't any possibility to establish a private basic education institution. Our National Expert has identified five such schools, members of international chains, which are licensed to work as "experimental programs" by the government. In Montenegro, private schools can be established if they fulfill certain criteria (e.g.: minimum number of pupils, etc.) and, very interestingly, provided there is no primary public school in the area; thus, establishing private schools is de facto impossible.

When it comes to decentralization, as an important governance setting in the region, the pathway has been similar in all examined countries. Whether it started early (e.g.: 2001 in Albania or Serbia) or later (e.g.: 2005 in Macedonia, 2008 in Bulgaria), the initial stage of decentralization in respect to education and quality assurance in education has been horizontal decentralization. At central level, autonomous and/ or advisory institutions in charge with quality assurance were created. Further decentralization attempts were mere forms of deconcentration. In most larger countries in the region regional branches of the national bodies (ministry/national inspectorate, etc.) function.

They perform a variety of tasks, from expert pedagogical supervision (inspection) to coordination of in-service training. More genuine decentralization started, in all countries, with some amount of fiscal decentralization. Local authorities started being responsible for the construction and maintenance of school buildings (in most cases, the ownership of school buildings was transferred to municipalities). In some cases, even the salary disbursement for teachers and administrative personnel was transferred

- but the national salary grid remained in place, with the notable exception of Bulgaria, where the system of delegated budgets went much farther. More often, schools became responsible for organizing pupils' transportation to school.

In most cases, there were several steps made towards greater involvement of both local governments and schools themselves (including parents) in educational process. School boards were introduced in Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Sloveni, Bulgaria and Montenegro, and piloted in Albania (through a World Bank - sponsored project). In most countries, their current powers are weak.

The greatest degree of decentralization has been, historically, in Slovenia, with a lot of focus on school autonomy. Here, so-called "branch schools" (very small community-based schools) have been the historical norm, in order to keep the school as tailored to the local setup as possible.

A very impressive level has been attained in Bulgaria, with the introduction of delegated budgets. Here, school directors have the legal authority to manage the operational budget of the school and decide on the allocation between staff salaries and other running costs. Schools are independent legal entities that can raise additional funds from other sources. Furthermore, school directors have the legal authority to hire and fire teachers. Individual teacher salaries and bonuses are determined by the school director. In respect to the quality assurance system, delegated budgets made it possible for schools to compete for students in order to receive more funding from the central government (the main component of each delegated school budget is number of students).

Romania is an interesting case. The Education Decentralization Strategy, although existing since 2005, has never been applied completely. Things are expected to change with the adoption of the New National Education Law in 2011. Because of various reforms sprinkled with plenty of political turmoil in 2012, some of the reforms envisaged by the new law are not implemented yet. Funding will be ensured per student, and the adoption and execution of school budget adoption will be done by the School Board. However, in contrast to Bulgaria, the leeway of School Board in executing the budget will be limited to investments; the salary grid for teachers and administrative staff will be established at national level.

Decentralization in the sense of enabling the school to tailor an average of 20% of the curriculum to local needs has been implemented already in all countries.

STEP 1 FINDINGS: COMPARATIVE CROSS-COUNTRY BASELINE REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Besides the results already described above concerning the general context in which Quality Assurance Systems operate in the region (decentralization, instructional vision, level at which quality assurance actions take place), Step 1 of our research revealed further insights on how regional QASs operate in theory, in each of their functions.

Goal setting function

For students, performance goals and standards are set by specialized institutions (in most countries in the sample) or by ad-hoc expert groups at ministerial level and usually approved by the Ministry in legally binding documents. Standards are formulated as specific, operationalized statements of what a student knows and is able to do and they can be verified by testing or by observing. Achievements standards are formulated very differently from country to country, and while some specify what is minimum achievement, average achievement and high achievement, others point out only the minimum level. Some examples of how these student goals and standards are formulated can be found in Table 4:

Table 4. Formulating student goals and standards

	MACEDONIA	SERBIA
Performance goals in subject curricula	**Subject**: Macedonian language (grade 6) **Program area**: Expression; **Specific goals**: the student can: use appropriate words for communication; lead an official and private conversation with the teacher, school director, pedagogue etc.	
Assessment standards	E.g. **Subject**: Macedonian language (grades 5-9) **Topic**: Syntax; **Knowledge and skills**: Memorizing; **Standard**: the student knows how to: select logical sentences; differentiate between a simple and complex sentence, etc.	E.g.: Serbian language**:** **Basic level**: finds and singles out basic information from the text according to the given criteria **Middle level**: finds, singles out and compares information from two or more short texts (according to the given criteria) **Advanced level**: singles out arguments from the text in support of a thesis or an idea or provides contra arguments; draws conclusions based on more complex text

Source. National by-laws Macedonia and Serbia

For teachers, goal setting refers only to formal requirements – content taught, hours per week etc. and not outcomes – actual skills and knowledge transferred to pupils. Mandatory pre-set evaluations (e.g.: after five/ ten/ twenty years in service) allow teachers to receive salary raises and higher titles - in this sense, standards can be considered more like qualification, than performance standards. In some countries goals are formally adopted (e.g.: Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia), in others these standards are not official (e.g.: Macedonia), and not all countries have a grading scale.

Table 5. Teacher achievment standards

ROMANIA	MACEDONIA
• **Use of TIC for activity projection;** • **Use of teaching strategies which ensure the applicability of learning and training specific skills;** • **Design of extracurricular activities related to curriculum goals, needs and interests of learners, and school management plan.** • **Ensuring transparency criteria, assessment procedures, and evaluation's results** • **Motivation of pupils by valorization of examples for good practices.**	Though no official standards are set, the Education Inspectorate uses an instrument consisting of the following areas: Teaching (planning and preparation, realization, preparing instructional means, planning and realizing additional classes, student assessment, planning and realizing PTA meetings), other educational duties (certificates for professional development, (co)authored textbooks, participated in projects, etc.) For example, for the area: Planning and preparation for the class, three criteria are provided: 1. Does not plan (0 points) 2. Incomplete planning (4 points) 3. Complete planning (8 points)

Source: Own analysis

There are no per se performance standards for principals in our region. Principals have responsibilities in front of the School Board (to present budget, annual work plan, etc.), but there is no clear guidance as to how board members can evaluate their performance in these areas. Very importantly, all guidelines refer to financial and organizational management and are not related to student outcomes (e.g.: improved management skills for school directors especially as concerns budget forecast and delivery). Qualification standards however do exist (e.g.: certain number of years of experience as teacher, passing an exam, etc.). In Serbia, competence standards for principals are under development. In Romania, the agency ensuring education quality establishes performance standards (can be seen as applicable both to principals and to schools), which get adopted in a school's management plan. An excerpt from a specific management plan reads:

1. Development of quality culture at the level of school; monitoring by Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEQA)
2. Ensuring relevant legislation at school level; presentations and dissemination of legislative news; completion of database with the new laws/ normative acts
3. Update of job descriptions and evaluation sheets according to in force legislation

In terms of performance standards for schools, there is no considerable variation across countries in the sample. In Romania, Macedonia and Serbia, school performance standards are drafted by specialized agencies, approved by the ministry and verified by inspectorates. They target a broad set of dimensions, such as strategic and operational management, but also refer to school facilities or results/ achievements. In Albania and Montenegro for instance, the goal setting process for schools is shifted more at school-levels, where school management bodies set their own achievement goals. Examples of formulations can be seen in table 6:

Table 6. Goal-setting process for schools

ROMANIA	MACEDONIA
• **Self-assessment and peer assessment of students are systematically used in learning activities;** • **"Education provider shows progress in the last three years / from the last external evaluation, as against the National System of Education Indicators (SNIE) on school education results for the type of schools and risk category." The students' achievement included within (SNIE) the results of international assessments (PISA), outcomes on the labour market, and the results of national assessments;** • **Consultative bodies of relevant beneficiaries for school meet periodically;** • **School communicates systematically with parents and other beneficiaries from community.**	National Education Council adopted standards in 2010. There are 7 main areas of school quality: School program and Annual work plan; Teaching and learning; Student achievement; Support to students; Ethos; School organization and leadership; Resources. Examples: • Students and teachers' performance results are publicly announced and promoted. • Healthy life styles are promoted in the school. • The school applies specific actions in order to follow success of its students.

Source: Own analysis

In all countries, schools can set their own extra performance goals. However, the achievement of those goals is monitored at school level, and is not reported to the central government.

The achievement of extra performance goals is not incentivized with greater funding from the central government. In general schools are required to carry development plans (varying in length from one to five years), in which they can set extra performance goals.

In general, the common feature in all countries in the sample is that the goal setting function of a QAS is a top-down process, characterized by iterative interactions between the ministries for education and specialized agencies in charge with quality assurance.

Clients do not seem to be involved in this function, not even judging from "on paper" arrangements (Slovenia constitutes a bit of an exception, as regular school teachers are given a greater voice in goal setting).

Performance evaluation

For students, performance evaluation is done regularly, by their teachers. In addition, there are regular national standardized tests in all countries in the sample (ranging from one to three throughout the basic education cycle, with at least one being mandatory). Macedonia is an outlier in the sense national standardized examinations are not carried yearly, but sporadically and on a pilot basis; Slovenia is also an outlier in the sense it focuses a lot on international tests, as at least a third of schools participate each time in an international standardized test (PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS, etc.).

There is no blueprint for the performance evaluation of teachers and processes vary greatly from country to country. In some countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia) it is performed mostly at school level, by either principals and/ or expert school-based bodies; in some cases, it is ultimately validated by the School Board (Romania). In others (Albania, Macedonia, Serbia), it is conducted by regional offices of the ministry and also as integral part of the periodical evaluation of schools. In general, the evaluation of teachers is related to periodical promotions and salary increases (e.g.: every five, ten, twenty years); in Slovenia, before the economic crisis, the annual assessment of teachers by the school principals could lead to salary increases truly connected to performance. In general, the evaluation of teachers is not related to the results of their students in national standardized tests, with the exception of Macedonia, where such a procedure is being planned. An examples of performance evaluation grids for teachers can be seen in Table 7.

For principals, performance evaluation is either non-existent (Albania, Bulgaria), is done by the School Board (Serbia, Slovenia) or is connected to the integral evaluation of schools (Montenegro, Macedonia). In Romania, principals seem to be evaluated mostly and most often out of all countries in the sample (yearly mandatory self-evaluations followed by inspections).

For schools, performance evaluation is done regularly (every three to five years, depending from country to country) as part of an integral evaluation done either by inspectorates or by a combination between inspectorates and centralized agencies in charge with quality assurance (the case of Romania). The report drafted by inspectors is re-validated with the principal. Regular self-evaluations of schools are prescribed either as an optional or as mandatory process in all countries in the sample. In some countries, school-based committees involving as well parents and students are supposed to perform this task (Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania).

Communication and reporting

When it comes to communication and reporting, as a function of the QAS, there seems to be, even at normative level, a culture of non-communication (with respect to the performance evaluation of all actors, with the exception of pupils). Results and feedback at all levels by all actors are typically considered as related to individual performance, and thus perceived as confidential. Hence laws do not mandate the public sharing of results, with some exceptions.

Table 7. Performance evaluation grids for teachers

BULGARIA No national pre-defined standard; excerpt from school-level grid, filled in by Pedagogical Council	Max. 100 pts. Component 1: Planning, organizing and conducting the educational process – up to 10 points; Component 2: Using interactive and/or innovative methods in the educational process – up to 8 points; Component 3: Team-work and supporting the educational environment (work and communication with the Pedagogical council, participation in committees etc.) – up to 8 points; Component 4: Work with pupils and teachers – up to 8 points; Component 5: Work with pupils for their preparation for local, regional, national and international competitions – up to 7 points; Component 6: Work with parents – up to 6 points; Component 7: Work with pupils and teachers in out-of class activities – up to 7 points; Component 8: Methodological support to new teachers – up to 7 points;

In some countries the laws prescribe the operation of an information management system to collect all performance evaluation data, but this is not operational in any of the countries in the sample. Benchmarking of schools is not mandated in any country (Bulgaria iscollecting benchmarking data, but does not publish them; in Macedonia the law prescribes that the State Examination Center should prepare a National Report where teachers and schools will be ranked according to a sum of several indicators – this legal provision is not operational yet however).

When it comes to the performance evaluation of students, laws that form the QAS mandate that parents be informed about results regularly (most often through student notebooks, in which teachers write down the results), and in few cases – though there is a trend in this direction – through a password-protected online system (already implemented in Slovenia for instance, and in some schools in Bulgaria as well). The results of national standardized tests are usually made public, online; in some cases (Romania) anybody can see a particular student's results in a particular subject, and in others parents have access only to the results of their own children (Slovenia). In Slovenia, schools themselves can view an individual school average compared to the national one.

The performance evaluation of teachers is not publicly communicated. Even in those countries where teacher evaluation may lead to salary increases (e.g.: Slovenia, Bulgaria), the protocols, scorecards and performance reports remain an internal document of the school, accessible only to education inspectorates/ advisory bodies. Reports on the performance evaluation of principals are usually compiled by external assessors/ inspectors, on forms developed specifically for this purpose (usually, there is no uniform standard). They may be also self-compiled by the principals and reported for validation to the School Board. Laws usually do not contain requirements for the dissemination of these results.

The QASs in the region in general do not mandate the result of the performance evaluation of schools be made public. In Bulgaria a new law is expected to go in this direction; a similar "opening" process is undergoing in Macedonia; right now, school scorecards are public in this country, on the website of the State Education Inspectorate (this is a unique phenomenon in our region; the only other country to have implemented this is Serbia, on a pilot basis). However, scorecards contain limited information: basic data on the school, executive summary, school characteristics, curricula and syllabuses (realization, quality, extracurricular activities), student achievement, student dropout rates, repeaters; teaching and learning (planning, process/methods of instruction, students' experience with learning, assessment, etc.), support for students, school climate, resources, school management, findings and recommendations. The reports from the school's self-evaluations should be published on the school's and municipality's websites (this is left at the principals' discretion in other countries, Serbia for instance). In Serbia, the Ministry of Education has to publish an annual report about the external evaluation of schools at the level of the regional administrative offices; however, this provision is not operational yet.

Resource allocation

Resource allocation has clearly not been understood as a QAS function in our region – not even according to the existing normative framework, let alone in practice. Countries in our sample can be placed on a continuum starting from those where resource allocation has been partially integrated as a QAS function and inevitably led to more autonomy for schools (with the System for Delegated Budgets – SDB – Bulgaria being the regional champion in this respect, followed then by Romania – where a milder version of the SDB has just been adopted Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, Macedonia). The rest of the countries (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia) are still clearly tributary to the "old system" of centrally-controlled resource allocation based on needs, not on performance/ localized circumstances. In all countries in the sample, the majority of funding originates from the central budget (on average, 80%) with the rest from local budgets and school's own fundraising efforts. All countries allow schools to fundraise (from renting premises, to EU funding, to receiving donations) and some exert more control over how schools spend this money (e.g.: Montenegro, Macedonia), while others leave expenditure at the school's discretion. In general, because of educational decentralization, municipalities cover running and maintenance costs (utilities, etc.), either on a student-basis (in more modern countries in terms of resource allocation), or simply by "paying the bills" every month, based on school estimates (e.g.: Montenegro).

Autonomy, support, intervention (provision of technical-pedagogical support)

Expert bodies (e.g.: Institute for Education Development in Albania, Bureau for the Development of Education in Macedonia, National Education Institute in Slovenia) or deconcentrated bodies of the ministry (e.g.: in Serbia) or inspectorates provide teacher training and expert pedagogical support. Guidance and support relationships are poorly specified in existing regulations (e.g.: it is not clear how schools in Macedonia can request the support of the Bureau for the Development of Education advisors, based on the results of their regular evaluation). Schools must in most cases prepare a regular plan for the continuous professional development of teachers, but regulations are not too clear on how such programmatic documents are operationalized.

Specialized institutions responsible for steering the system of professional development for teachers select certain training programs provided either internally or by third parties and draft a so-called catalogue of training, that teachers choose programs from. Thus, the enrolment in national training programs is not based on standardized performance evaluation, but on preferences and available trainings. The financing of these programmes is very diverse and there is clearly no South-Eastern European blueprint.

The same heteregenous character of the setup of support programmes for teachers can be seen with support programmes for vulnerable groups. These groups are very significant in the region and consist of different ethnic minorities in different countries in the sample; the rural – urban gap in achievement is significant in the entire region (e.g.: in Macedonia for instance rural areas lag behind 90 PISA points in contrast to urban areas). In general, it would seem that the primary intervention means currently available are directed at ensuring access to education, rather than at improving the performance of pupils. Such means encompass: free textbooks, free transportation, conditional cash transfer programmes for families, scholarships (but not usually rewarding performance, just compensating for the underprivileged status).

For bad performing students, all countries offer, at school-level, remedial classes. For bad performing teachers, there is in general no support system. Teachers' license (professional permission to teach) may be suspended or terminated in case of serious disciplinary offense. In general, the legislative framework does not comprise systematic intervention principles and actions for bad performing schools. Good performance isn't rewarded with more autonomy in any country in the sample.

Accountability and consequences

The system of accountability and consequences is fairly clearly and consistently designed throughout the region in the case of students. Penalties for noncompliance with school ethics, minimum level of knowledge on subjects, accepted standards for behavior at school etc. usually include reprimand, the obligation to sit for remedial classes, repeating class, moving the student to different a class group or even to a different school.

In general, when it comes to teachers, as the evaluation system for teachers and schools principals is based on inputs and not on outcomes, the consequences for noncompliance with standards, law, norms and regulations does not differ from those envisaged under a regular labour contract.

Based on fulfilling the cursus honorum, acquiring a certain number of years in the profession and passing the evaluation system described above, teachers receive merit degrees, which are accompanied by fixed salary increases. To a certain extent, because of school autonomy, rewards for good performance (more or less at the principal's discretion) are a frequent practice in Bulgaria, while in Slovenia they used to be so before the economic crisis. Very interestingly, Macedonia envisages a very clear accountability system for teachers – not yet in place, though. In case of high performance of teachers (assessed on the 'objectiveness' of their assessment, i.e. overlapping of the grade given by the teacher and the one the student receives on the external assessment), there will be the possibility for 15% increase in the teacher's salary. In case of low performance of teachers (low 'objectiveness' or a discrepancy in two or more grades of the grade given by the teacher and the one the student receives on the external assessment), the teacher will be provided professional support, but if the same situation occurs the following year, s/he will be fined with 10% reduced salary; and if this occurs three years in a row, s/he will be dismissed.

In case of principals, the system of accountability and consequences is much more loose. The School Board can dismiss the principal in a number of cases (or propose his/her dismissal to upper bodies, depending on the design of the principal election system), like violating the statutory rules and regulations, not fulfilling the work programme, damage to students, parents and schools, etc. Macedonia seems to be the only country in the sample where it is envisaged that the principals may be dismissed in case. professors in the respective school will be evaluated as

STEP 2 FINDINGS: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

Expert interviews conducted in each country in the sample led National Experts in the team to give grades to how well the QASs are performing, in each of their functions, in integrating several real student needs. The index building displayed the following results: when it comes to QAS effectiveness, Bulgaria and Macedonia seem to score highest, with Albania and Serbia being the laggards (see Table 8).

A rank correlation between education outcomes (measured by PISA test results) and the QAS effectiveness score would look like portrayed in Table 9, telling to the fact that investigating those areas/ real needs in which QASs seem to be more deficient is more relevant for drawing policy implications than looking at QAS effectiveness holistically.

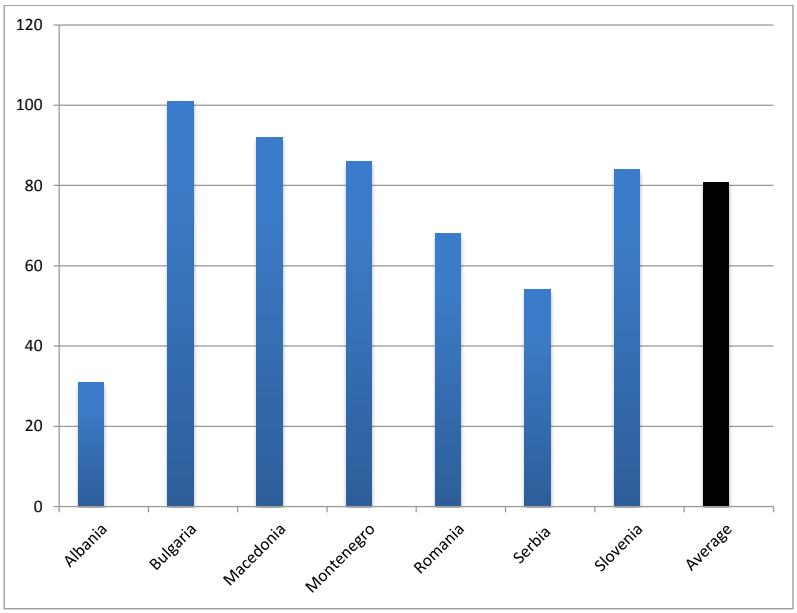
Table10 essentially confirms that the goal setting function,

i.e. the most basic function of a QAS, is most developed, followed by standard setting and measurement of student achievement. Communication and reporting also scores above average, primarily because of teachers' practice to inform parents on student achievement, but not in the sense of communication to the broader public.
Support and intervention is also a bit above the average, primarily because there is individual student support available in those key competences/ real needs that form the backbone of the learning system (e.g.: communication in mother tongue, mathematics).

As expected, those QAS functions which should round off a fully-fledged system, with genuine potential to improve learning outcomes, are strongly dysfunctional: accountability and consequences; resource allocation.

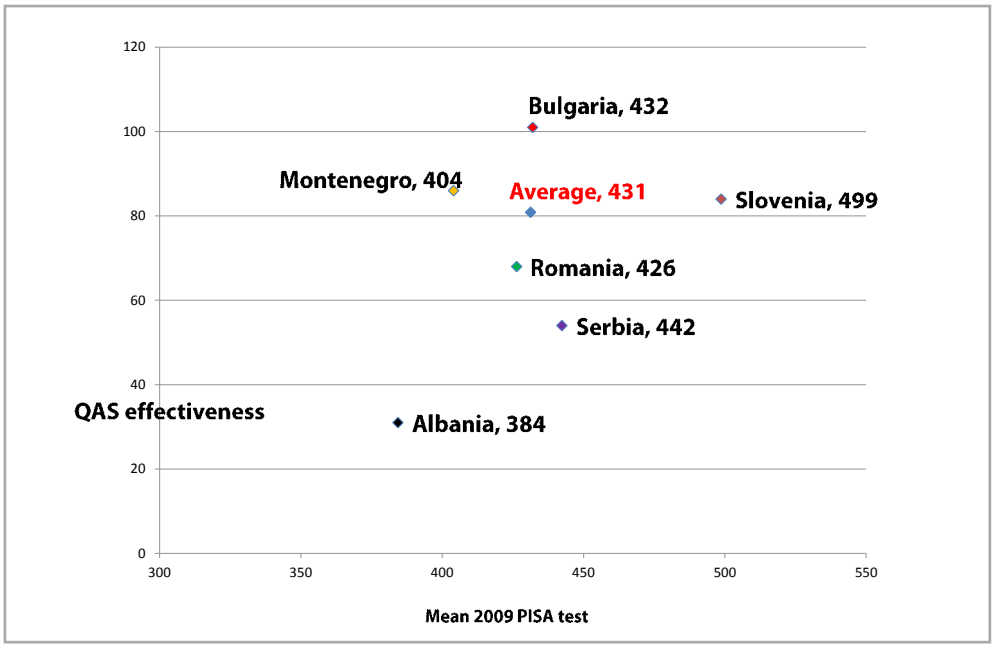
As we have stated from the very beginning, measuring holistically the effectiveness of a QAS can be misleading, as it involves the excessive simplification of very complex notions. Instead, measuring how a QAS responds to several key competences beneficiaries feel and/or to several real needs, which research indicate are conducive

Table 8. The effectiveness of Quality Assurance Systems in Basic Education in SEE



Source: Own Analysis

Table 9. Relationship between QAS effectiveness and 2009 PISA test scores

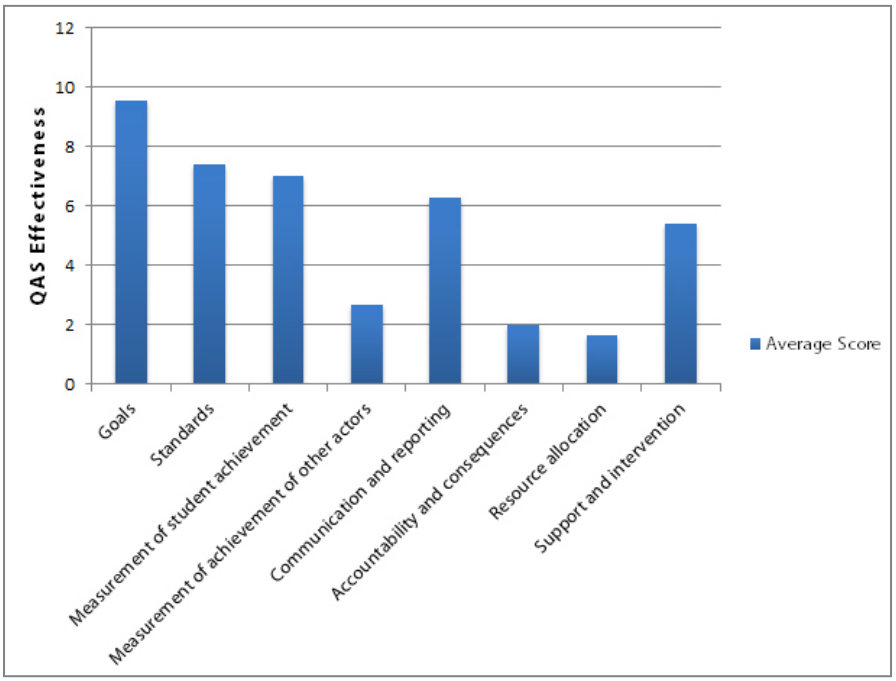


Source: own analysis, PISA test scores

to high-quality education – that we have identified in our methodology – might be more indicative to evaluate exactly in which directions QASs in the region are not performing. Table 11 shows that the real needs which directly students' social skills and real-life competences are those that QASs integrate least in their functions and workings: learning to learn and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Also, there are no clear goals, standards, measurement processes, reporting processes or consequences for parent participation, a prerequisite for increased accountability and relevance of educational processes.

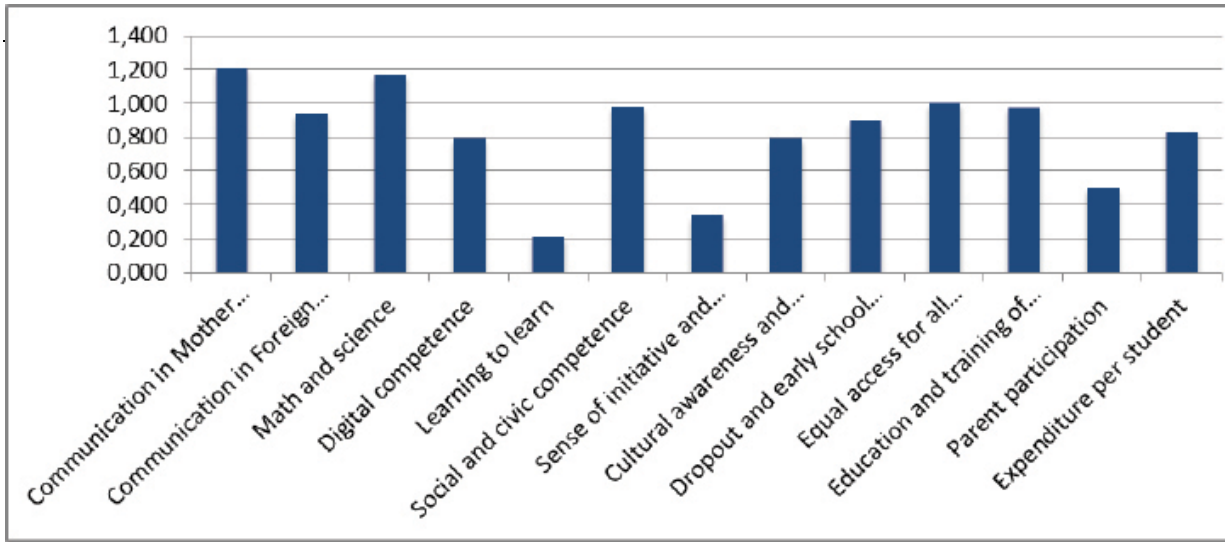
Communication in mother tongue and mathematics remain instead the real needs on which QASs focus. Digital competence is however poorly addressed by the current QAS setup, with countries in which there are no clear standards and goals in this area, let alone measurement and accountability processes in place. For a country by country break-down see Table 12.

Table 10. The efectiveness of QASs accross their functions



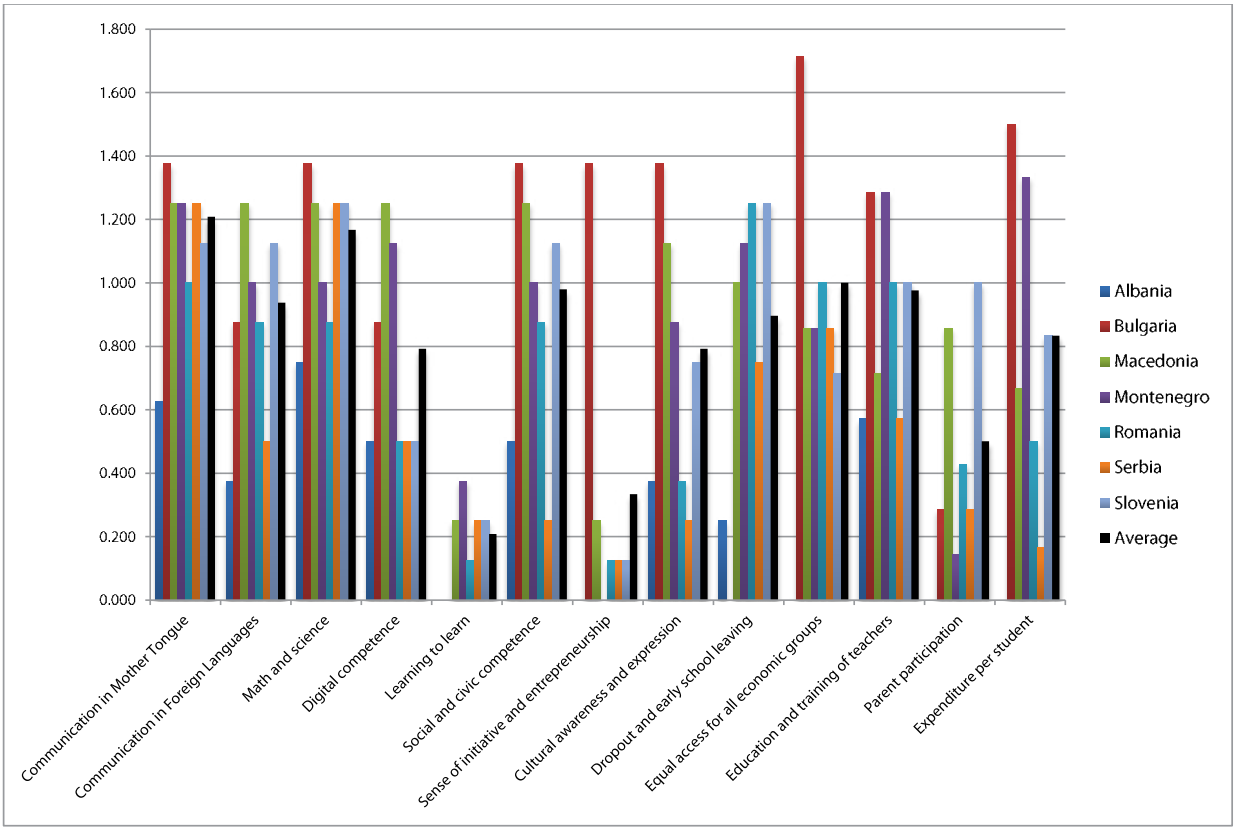
Source: own index

Table 11. How QAS' respond to beneficiaries'"real needs"



Source: Own Index

Table 12. QAS efectiveness by country and real need



Source: Own Index

In the area of how communication processes that go on between actors in a QAS, and especially the mismatch between communication flows "on paper" (as described in laws and regulations) and in practice, the results of experts' assessment, after having conducted various interviews in all the countries in the sample, reveal the following:

1) with the significant exception of Slovenia, communication processes are generally centralized, autocratic, top-down

2) the communication between institutions is loaded with paperwork, and becomes a very time-consuming process; in some cases, this happens between schools and local governments, on issues such as the approval of the annual work plan or of the budget (e.g. Macedonia); in other cases, this happens betweens schools and the relevant ministry (and subordinate institutions) - e.g.: Serbia, where, because the single information system is not yet operational, schools need to type in and submit to central bodies, at the beginning of each year, the same data about students as they had done in the previous year.

3) schools maintain irregular patterns of communication with parents (during parent-teacher meetings, and at the beginning, mid, and end of the year); information on education results is transmitted to parents individually, only for their child, without putting the individual child's results into perspective (for instance, by comparing against the national average, etc.). A parent, which also happened to be a teacher, which was interviewed for the purpose of this research in Macedonia, stated: *I as a parent of a schoolchild, and a teacher as well, sometimes have trouble understanding and linking the achievement standards and assessment criteria in certain subjects.*

4) important matters such as school development plans, the appointment of the principals, individual performance of each teacher, etc. are not subject to discussions initiated by parents with the school management.

5) in Macedonia, efforts toward greater communication with parents are undertaken through measures such as the legal obligation of schools to prepare and distribute brochures for parents, containing information on school staff, the curricula, rights and responsibilities of students and teachers; the Electronic Diary of the pupil is also being introduced (it is long established as a form of communication with parents in Slovenia for example)

6) usually, the results of the external evaluations of schools are not available to the general public; when they are, they are no in an understandable format; in some countries (e.g.: Macedonia) the law mandates the publication of the results of the school's self-evaluation on the school's webpage, but many schools do not have webpages.

7) the process of giving feedback to actors, especially to service providers, is heavily underdeveloped; some countries are struggling to improve this (e.g.: the National Inspectorate for Education in Albania has been recently created with the purpose of providing regular feedback to schools)

8) school and teacher ranking are not public information
9) media communication on education quality topics is also suffering from lack of consistency.

The Experience in Slovenia:

More effective communication processes have been identified in Slovenia. The communication between inspectorates and schools involves, as in other countries in the region, paperwork and verification of legal procedures. However, in practice inspectors interact quite often with parents, and even with students, via email. They are also assisted by experts from independent institutions (National Education Institute), and the cooperation is constant, both direct (including through informal meetings) and involving paperwork. The National Education Institute also cooperates directly with schools in bilateral school improvement projects. Monthly meetings with the Association of Parents and with the Headmaster' Association, including through the formation of working groups, have been initiated by central bodies. Exam results are also reported in a more purposeful manner than in other countries in the region to students and parents; they have access to the individual result of the pupil, the school average and the national average.

Based on the initial baseline review and on expert interviews, the **short route of accountability**, as far as quality assurance systems for basic education in South Eastern Europe is concerned, displays the following features:

1) in general, the two main reasons for the unsatisfactory involvement of parents as clients demanding accountability from service-providers and policy-makers are the lack of a clear, pre-set normative framework for parental involvement (e.g.: in some countries School Boards have very weak powers and are not carved out by law), and also the lack of a culture for cooperation, especially on core education-related processes, partially because of lack of incentives, partially because of obsolete mentalities (i.e. parents see the school as a self-sufficient black box, which holds the whole responsibility for the educational process and the educational outcomes; see also Radu 2012).

2) School Boards, as a pivotal element of the short route of accountability with a view to improved education quality, need to be strengthened in all countries in our sample; at different stages of development, they function in practice much weaker than their prerogatives on paper would indicate; in most countries (with the exception of Montenegro, where parents are obviously marginalized), parents have an equal number of seats in the board as local community representatives and school staff. In about half of the countries in the sample, they play in theory a very important role (or are about to play, given that in several countries new legislation is expected to enter into force in 2012) - developing the School Statute, annual program, developing programs, participating in the election of the school director, proposing candidates for teachers to the director, deciding upon complaints.

In practice, the autonomy and competence of the School Board depends on the independence of its members, and the attitude of the school director and the municipality's mayor. In principle, if a director wants to have a SB that without questioning supports all her decisions, can advise the teachers and parents close to her to apply as members. Evidence from Romania indicates that in general affluent parents are elected to the board, which have close connections with the management of the school (conflicts of interest sometimes), such as, in the case of a small community, the local police officer, the owner of the company that distributes the school croissants and milk in the universal national social support programme for basic education, and the local doctor. In general, there are no clear regulations and methodologies for the elections of parents in the School Board and/ or for the frequence of SB meetings.

Furthermore, in some cases teachers whose children study in the same school where they teach can be elected to the board in their capacity of parents. Even in the case of Slovenia, where the SB is clearly the highest managing body of the school, and where schools enjoy far greater autonomy than the regional average, the independence of the board is still problematic, and jeopardizes the ability of the board to control the management of the school.

Another important element is parents' perception of their role in the influence of school/ education affairs, as evidenced by regional surveys; there is a clear lack of understanding on behalf of the parents on their role in the education quality assurance setup. Most parents claim they do not have a say when it comes to school management and finances, issues concerning the education process and teaching, disciplinary measures, or issues of children's health and safety.

The percentages in table 13, although valid for Serbia, are representative of the region:

Table 13: Percentage of parents saying they have never been consulted on relevant topics

	Mainstream parents	Roma parents	Parent representatives	Roma parent representatives
School financial management	90	100	61	50
Extracurricular activities	76	66	52	40
Organization of school events	50	84	13	0
Health and safety issues	62	72	30	30
Overall school management	93	99	83	40
Educational matters (textbook, content of lesson, teacher assessment)	86	84	78	100
Pupil violence, expulsion and other pupil discipline issues	8	90	57	80

Source: Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality **in South East Europe Survey, http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/**

Some latest developments indicate that there are efforts at strengthening the short route of accountability: a new law in Bulgaria significantly empowering the School Board, the creation in Slovenia of an Association of Working Groups of the Parents Boards Slovenia (ZASSS), the success in Slovenia of a consultative stakeholder group in the parliament, whose member (the Tirana Parents Association) successfully advocated for a less overloaded curriculum and is now militating for greater powers for the School Boards.

When it comes to the **long route of accountability**, the participation of clients (individual parents, parents associations, other civil society organizations) is limited. The reasons are manifold: when new legislation is drafted and stakeholders are consulted, they feel that their input is only formal, and that the decisions have been already made; as a matter of fact, most new legislation is prepared in the "laboratories" of ministries and central agencies, without preliminary consultation, but only with ex-post stakeholder validation.

Another relevant cause is the fact parents are used to resorting to so-called defensive mechanisms – when they are not happy with the quality of education, they either withdraw their child from the respective class/ school or pay for private tutoring, instead of trying to improve the quality assurance system at a systemic level. In countries where international donors play an important role (e.g.: Macedonia, Albania), they also shape education policies and interact with decision-makers along the so-called route of accountability – of course, it may be questionable to what extent they voice the concerns of the "clients".

In all countries in the sample, the typical mechanism for increasing accountability is represented by the complaint – parents can file complaints about teachers, principals, the quality of education with the ministry or with other specialized bodies. Their complaints may result in irregular school inspections conducted with the respective school suspect of not abiding by existing rules and regulations. Some countries have made it easier for parents to voice such ad-hoc complaints (e.g.: in Bulgaria there is a "complaint button" on the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science), while in other countries the mechanism is more cumbersome. Even so, as interviewees revealed, it is almost impossible to fire a teacher in the pre-university education level because of his/her poor professional performance in school. Last but not least, one must underline, the success of civil society initiatives to improve the quality of education depends to a large extent on the intensity of media coverage.

One of the hypotheses of our research has been that the accountability relations within the quality assurance system are mainly restricted to the compact between service-providers (teachers, principals) and administrative decision-makers. In-depth interviews with stakeholders confirm that there indeed exists a South-East European blueprint from this perspective. The relationship between service providers and policy-makers is power-based, top-down, hierarchical. The idea persists among service providers that they indeed should and do account for their actions much rather to the administration (ministry, and foremost inspectorates) than to parents/students. School inspectors are in most countries in the sample seen by service-providers as "small ministers", yet the accountability relationship between them and providers rests less on clear-cut procedures and instruments, and much more on informal connections.

The interaction and control that policy-makers (government officials, inspectors) execute over providers (teachers, principals) is focused on procedural and organizational topics rather than teaching and educational outcomes. As there are still no effective ways of identifying a failing school/ teacher/principal (in terms of educational outcomes), service-providers are held accountable to perform according to the legal requirements (e.g. a teacher coming to job, teaching, doing assessments, etc.), but they are not held accountable for the quality of their work. There are reforms underway meant to make the compact more meaningful in all the countries in the sample by changing its basic foundations. Recent waves of 'standardization' (achievement standards, school quality standards, teacher competencies) and introduction of external assessments and internal assessments are top-down efforts to regulate previously neglected 'output' segments of the system. In some countries, these efforts are at more advanced stages (e.g.: Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Slovenia) and in others they are more incipient (e.g.: Serbia, Albania, Montenegro).

Table 14. The incentive system created by QASs.

FOR PUPILS	FOR PARENTS	FOR TEACHERS	FOR PRINCIPALS	FOR DECISION-MAKERS
To remember rather than to understand *"When we verbally examine a student he starts with an excellent grade and we penalize him for not knowing one detail or another"* (Interview with teacher in Bulgaria) Financial rewards & recognition for high achievement in international contests.	None, other than involvement on specific individualized issues related to their own children's performance. No functional mechanisms for systemic parental involvement.	Little room for innovation and bottom-up approaches in rel. to decision-makers. Evaluation is often subjective and biased. The assessment is based on teacher's personal relationship to the principal. Keeping as many students as possible in school, because school's budgets depends on this (e.g.: Bg, Ro, Sl) In some countries - Some financial incentives in terms of performance-based salary grid (not yet applied in Macedonia, no clear assessment criteria in BG)	Core actor in basic education (BG, SL, Montenegro), with little control mechanisms. ⟷ Confrontation.	Not to be exposed => setting of broad and achievable goals & no external/ objective assessment. Increase in reputation and financial rewards if students perform high in international competitions. School autonomy – not linked with greater autonomy in any country in the sample. Self-evaluation created gaming strategies in some countries (Ro).

Source: Own analaysis

This newly promoted compact assumes diversifying the input (curriculum instead of plan and program, more financial and organizational autonomy), some elements of control over the process (external evaluation), good overview of the outputs (external assessments and evaluations) and support for organizational learning (self-evaluation, school development planning). The incentive system created by the QASs is summarized in Table 14.

STEP 3 FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW IN ROMANIA AND MACEDONIA

In Romania, actors in schools (teachers, principals) perceive the existence of three mechanisms for increasing education quality: the assessment of the school as a whole done by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (RAQAPE); the performance evaluation of teachers in classrooms (usually evaluated through school inspections); the competition between schools for attracting students with a high socio-economic profile and for increasing their reputation. The main procedures centrally created to increase education in schools and deployed on the ground by RAQAPE are found by actors to be, bluntly put, pointless. The main tool for assessing the quality of education in schools recognized as such by the teachers interviewed is the Annual Internal Evaluation Report on Quality Education (AIER), conducted by RAQAPE; based on internal reports made by each school under the supervision of the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEQA), constituted at school-level, RAQAPE drafts an annual report on quality assurance in primary and secondary education by means of aggregated/ centralized data from schools where this report

was completed. Actors in schools, including school staff that usually sit in CEQA, characterize this process as "formal", an empty shell, a dry statistical exercise.

Managers, teachers and even members of CEQA do not know in detail the quality standards developed by RAQAPE. The actors we have interviewed indicated that the data and findings collected through advanced tools by RAQAPE is only a time-consuming exercise, without shifting the vision, the approach or the management in school's everyday practice. A series of teachers have reported that filling in AIER forms procedure is not only useless, but even counterproductive as it consumes substantial time needed to fill the questionnaires, a time which otherwise could be allocated to teaching .There are several reasons for this implementation failure:

1) Teachers who are CEQA members lack the financial incentives for participating in this body in charge with quality assurance; activities performed are seen as a never-ending, unnecessary activity

2) Lack of personalized feedback offered to schools by centralized bodies, based on the school's AIER; several respondents expressed their belief that these reports are not carefully read, if at all, and that their whole meaning is to perpetuate the existing bureaucratic structure and to maintain jobs.

3) The quality standards included as criteria in the AIER are too complex, cumbersome, laborious and do not assess the progress regarding student achievement, by singling out the contribution of the school to the child's advancement

4) Parents are totally not familiar with quality standards, including those parents sitting on School Boards

5) AIER is fundamentally based on self-assessment and implies actors' objective reporting capability; centralized data indicate that, in practice, actors exaggerate their self-assessment (more than 90% of public schools appear on paper as having good or excellent working conditions).
With regards to the system of school inspections, considerable implementation flaws can be identified here as well. Teachers are familiar with the inspections specific evaluation procedures, but they question its design. The central task of school inspectors is to evaluate the supporting papers (lesson plan, lessons outlines, students scoring sheets, etc.); teachers end up crafting beautifully written papers and hide poor achievement behind nice words. Te compulsory production of excessive paperwork – the "red tape", "scrap", "paperwork", "bureaucracy" - was a leitmotif cited by almost all interviewed teachers.

Inspectors also assist lessons, yet the relevance of this practice is questionable. The lessons the inspectors assist are "directed", namely the lesson supervised is ready beforehand, repeated over and over again - one of respondents who attended such lesson noted students who provided correct answers to questions that had not been asked yet by teachers.

The dominant orientation of stakeholders seems to be towards identifying exceptionality in school attainment. Actors in schools from poorer or rural areas complain that this focus disregards the school's actual contribution to educational progress, as exceptional achievers usually derive their results less from school and more from parental support. In one of the schools in which we conducted interviews, over 70% of the children had an underprivileged background (unemployed parents, Roma parents, etc.); 10-12% of the children had illiterate mothers and delinquency was a significant issue. There was no regular contact between parents and schools for more than 50% of the pupils. Applying the criterion of producing Olympiad-level students or students that score perfect A-s in national standardized tests to a school that has trouble keeping children enrolled is inadequate. To conclude, one of the main implementation failures of the current QAS in Romania is that it does not allow for a weighted evaluation of school performance, taking into account the socio-economic profile of students enrolled.

With respect to the School Board, current legal provisions are not applied in practice. Although the law requires that most of the School Board be composed of parents and local officials, in all schools where we conducted case studies the majority in the School Board was held by school teachers. One of the processes that ensures more teachers in SB is finding a teacher who has a child in that school and including him/her in SB as a parent. The lack of a methodology for electing parents to the SB has been identified as a shortcoming of the current setup. At the same time, councillors with local municipalities are not incentivized to participate in SB meetings – they are assigned to many schools and their participation in SB meetings is not remunerated.

In practice, the teachers' union role in ensuring the quality of education services is rather marginal. Most teachers are members of unions, whole role is to defend teachers' employment contracts. The role of NGOs is minimal; in schools with a high socio-economic profile, parents associations, constituted as NGOs, play a more active role.

Inequality and social segregation remain, as a conclusion of the Implementation Review, one of the main obstacles in the establishment of an equitable and effective QAS. While the competition between schools for attracting the best students has led de facto to an increased preoccupation of schools to ensure high quality education, it has also enabled widening the gap between socio-economic categories. Schools with a favourable social profile attract parents with a high social standing through a process of mobility between school districts. Normally, parents are required to enrol their children, as a first option, in the school of residency, and in other schools only if those have places left, but in practice "[rich, educated] parents find ways to send their children wherever they want" (Source: Interview with teacher). Teachers with a good reputation are reluctant to teach in schools with a significant share of students from disadvantaged groups, and there is little staff retention therein (with adverse effect on education achievement);

schools from disadvantaged areas are at the bottom of the priority investments list (while being poorer, its capacity to attract investments by persuading decision-makers is lower). The question does remain: how to breed competition and choice (recognized by stakeholders are contributing to increased quality), while avoiding increasing inequalities?

Besides the school enrolment process, field interviews revealed other mechanisms that ultimately lead to socio-economic segregation. At class level, students from better-off families are concentrated in certain classes. This is possible due to "skimming" – informally, most reputable first grade teachers can freely compose their classes, and they tend to choose students whose parents have a superior socio-economic status – because they'd naturally pose less achievement problems. Secondly, teachers in classrooms with a high socio-economic profile, tend to constantly strive and improve their teaching, because they know they are "monitored" by competent parents. Thirdly, existing regulations prevent schools from designing classes more conducive to better learning in cases of high concentrations of students from underprivileged backgrounds. The school management cannot address such a situation, for instance, by reducing the statutory number of students in classes.

In Macedonia, the Implementation Review revealed a series of similarities to the Romanian case: the QAS also tends to be excessively skewed towards the high-achievers (students, teachers). Methods and instruments for assessing the actual progress in the everyday work of teachers with students are lacking. The ability of parents to contribute as drivers of quality education depends on their socio-economic status. Actors emphasize the need for differentiated attainment standards based on the socio-economic profile of the student. Inspections, part of the integral school evaluation, are blamed in Macedonia as well for focusing excessively on administration and paperwork, instead of on the actual implementation of classes. The excessive amount of paperwork involved is seen as one of the main flaws of the QAS and there are suspicions of gaming figures/facts. The lack of adequate feedback after school inspections is also discouraging.

At the same time, standards and goals are known and perceived as useful on a much wider scale in Macedonia than in Romania. All interviewees in Macedonia, when asked and reminded about the standards (and goals), agreed that they are important for quality education, especially as a starting point and as a guideline for the work of teachers; in contrast to Romania, standards were recognized as useful in everyday work.
Teachers are more familiar with the performance standards that apply to students and to themselves, while school support staff and management with the standards for school achievement. Several improvement suggestions have been proposed by actors on the ground, such as a differentiation between the standards for grade-level teachers (1st -5th grade) and subject-level teachers (6th-9th grade). Parents are also, in relative terms, more aware of the goals and standards expected from teachers and students.

While in Romania actors on the ground pointed out that most inspections and demonstrative lessons are arranged well in advance, in Macedonia this was the case only in some of the schools under scrutiny. The visits performed by the Bureau for the Development of Education (BDE), although rare, are seen as much more conducive to improvement, since they are primarily corrective and advisory. Moreover, the overall assessment of a teacher is based less on the observance of classes, but on the self-assessment questionnaire and the interview with the teacher. At the same time, the overlap and lack of coordination between the Ministry, the State Education Inspectorate and the Bureau for the Development of Education has taken the form of confusing instructions and repetitive control mechanisms directed at schools.

Distinctly from Romania, in Macedonia principals and psychologists/pedagogues report to visit regularly teachers' classes. These visits are used as a method to keep teachers "alert", but also to assist them on methodological and assessment issues. Teachers value this form of supervision and support as more relevant for their day-to-day work than inspectors' visits. Also in contrast to Romania, school actors in Macedonia saw the self-evaluation process as a very useful practice. Pre-determined guidelines were considered clear and schools felt they were advancing with their data-gathering skills, developing school evaluation instruments and reporting objectively. The performance of the School Board also seems to be better in Macedonia; no actor influences the board single-handedly, but there is still a lot of room for improvement, firstly in communicating the decisions of the board to the wider public and secondly in introducing quality-related aspects on the agenda.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To attain higher quality education, states in South-Eastern Europe must focus on developing those QAS functions, which are currently still underdeveloped (e.g.: measuring the achievement of other actors than students; communication and reporting; accountability and consequences; resource allocation; school autonomy, support and intervention). In other words, reforms must go further, more boldly, so that countries in the region will be able to complete the QAS loop.
School boards must be made more effective and specific remedies in their functioning must be developed in each country, based on how far the reforms of introducing school boards went. Their powers, including those

of principals, must be strengthened, however, with due accountability mechanisms in place; for instance, the hiring and firing of teachers should be done at school-level, with the involvement of the School Board, based on clearly developed performance standards. In close relationship to this idea of strengthening the School Board, it is crucial that countries develop the means to incentivize parent participation in school life, so that parents will be able to perceive themselves as active shapers of the system, and not only as influencers of their own child's performance within school.

Another important stakeholder not yet participating in quality-related aspects of school-life, despite increasing decentralization, are local municipalities. Efforts at involving them as stakeholders in education have been, in all countries in the sample, implemented half-way or even "quarter-way". Their capacity to influence the quality of education is in most cases reduced to money disbursement for utility expenses, despite their mandatory presence in school boards and their role (in some countries) in shaping a portion of the curriculum. Central bodies (ministries, institutes, quality-focused agencies) should implement programmes at strengthening their professional capacity to address education issues.

Of concern in all countries in the sample is the independence and objectiveness of the external assessment of schools, including of teachers and principals. Country-specific mechanisms must be developed in this direction, trying to overcome actors' resistance at being exposed to a truly objective external assessment.

Of paramount importance remain the system for advancement, professional development and payment of teachers. The Bulgarian system of delegated budgets could become an interesting proposition for all countries in the region. It is difficult to imagine school autonomy - implemented in most countries in the region or at least considered a desirable objective - can function without financial autonomy. In most current setups, teachers have very little incentives for striving to achieve professional excellence and, as recent research shows, teacher training and motivation are probably one of the strongest elements conducive to high-quality education.

As mentioned before, communication and reporting is a QAS function which works ineffectively in all countries in the sample; parents and the wider public do not have access to user-friendly, comparable reports on the evaluation of schools, rendering an objective, fact-based comparison between schools and/ or between teachers impossible. Given the amount of data already collected from schools, in all countries in the sample, a smart communication of these data to stakeholders can be imagined, possibly via an Education Management Information System.

Those relevant "real needs" identified as important for delivering high-quality education and implicitly for increasing student achievement and integration in society, labour market, etc. should be included in a QAS framework (e.g.: learning to learn, parent participation, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, equal access for all economic groups). This should be done firstly by developing standards and then by including them in subsequent QAS functions (evaluation and measurement, communication and reporting, resource allocation, etc.)

Country-wise, specific policy recommendations read as follows:

BULGARIA

Table 15. Bulgaria policy recommendations

RECOMMENDATION	DEGREE OF APPLICABILITY / POSSIBILITY
Independent external assessment	Not very plausible. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has an interest to control the external assessment. The new law indicates the ext. assessment as a separate function in QAS, but it is also necessary to have an independent assessment institution.
Publicly accessible information for the inspections and the external assessment.	Plausible with regard to external assessment but almost impossible with regard to schools' inspections.
Standardization of the external assessment and self-evaluations.	Very plausible within the new law on education. However, still unclear what the standards will include.
More precise and policy oriented goal-setting on different levels and interlink between them.	Very problematic as the system is only top-down oriented. No proper communication mechanisms for local interests. School objectives shall comply with government policy.
Principals to be selected by a body including parents and municipal representatives.	Unlikely as the Ministry of Education, Youthand Science most likely will want to keep the direct appointment and control.
Increased parents' participation in school life.	Likely to change. Still not enough incentives for parents, teachers and principals to intensify this cooperation.
More precise instruments for supervision and control over the work of principals.	Standard is perceived in this direction within the new law.
The role of local municipal authorities in school matters shall be increased.	Currently their involvement is limited to budgetary issues. The new law foresees the involvement of municipal representative in the new Public Councils.
There formula for the delegated budgets shall include an indicator for minorities and rural areas in order to protect schools from closure.	Plausible option for supporting the least developed regions/schools.
International assessment shall be used for goal setting at national level.	Hard to be accepted by the ministry it will not correlate with the results of the national external assessment.
More freedom in teaching practices.	Almost impossible as a new paradigm shift is required.

MACEDONIA

Table 16. Macedonia policy recommendations

For BDE:	**For MoES:**	**For Ministry of Finance**
Until revision of existing standards, the BDE needs to assure that all teachers are trained to use the achievement standards and couple them with the assessment criteria. To complete the system of teacher professional development, develop control & accountability mechanisms regulating teacher training.	Revising the current design and purpose of the external assessment through encouraging feedback and input from different stakeholders, from the BDE and SAC to the schools. Revising the Law on Primary Education by: placing more responsibility on the Director and the School Board for employing and/or giving tenure to a teacher based on the assessment of the quality of teaching; greater accountability of BDE for the quality of the external assessment Conducting National Assessments and regular participation in international assessments for developing evidence–based education policies. Developing a rulebook on implementing the advancement of teachers through titles/degrees	Separate budget lines for primary and pre-school education in order to provide the possibility to follow the budget for primary education in comparison to the other education levels
Long-term goal: Review existing achievements standard based on assessment conducted on samples of students in order to set realistic achievement benchmarks. Accompany revised standards by examples of tasks/assignments and their assessment methods.	Setting clear goals and standards for the 'learning to learn' competency. Greater inclusion of the civil sector and especially teachers and associations of teachers in the design of policies.	

MONTENEGRO

Table 17. Montenegro policy recommendations

	FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:	FOR SCHOOLS:
MUST HAVE	Secure professional development and technical support to local communities (municipalities) and schools for their joint work on curriculum development.	Develop a strategy for informing parents, NGOs on possibilities for participation.
NICE TO HAVE	To develop a national network for support to prepare teachers and principals on how to improve cooperation with parents and the local community.	The annual evaluation process should be performed with parents and community members.

ROMANIA

Table 18 Romania policy recommendations

SHORT TERM:	LONG TERM:
Simplifying the internal quality assessment procedure (i.e. AIER); When evaluating school/ principal/ teacher performance, discount for the profile of the surrounding environment (parents, socio-economic status, etc.); Publicly available benchmarking of schools/ comparison between the quality of educational services provided A clear methodology for democratically and transparently electing parents to the School Board, ensuring that parents from all socio-economic categories are included; Rethink methodology for school enrolment in the 1st grade Following on the submission of the AIER to centralized bodies, schools should receive feedback, expert analysis and support Change the operating rules of CEQA and make it truly relevant for the school's management; solutions might comprise incentives for those teachers that are part of CEQA (e.g.: less teaching hours), simplifying the activity of the CEQA and re-focusing it on school service outcomes	Reform QAS goals and standards as to focus on "outcomes" (level of students' functions/skills that enable them to perform well in society) / "outputs", and shift away from the current focus on "inputs" (e.g.: school's management strategies, school facilities, etc.) Shift the focus from self-evaluation to external evaluation, performed with the help of objective tools for data collection Include indicators related to the school's inclusiveness and anti-segregation practices as relevant in the overall performance of a school; adopt a plan of measures to ensure the equality of education services provided among schools (e.g.: incentives for schools that enroll a high percentage of children from disadvantaged groups; mandatory endowment of these schools with a psychologist and a police officer; Step by Step programmes; incentivizing teachers to work in such schools) Strengthen parents' associations at national level, as to shape a genuine long route of accountability in the country

SERBIA

Table 19. Serbia policy recommendations

Central level	
Ministry (together with other involved state institutions) should develop a policy document with a comprehensive overview on the state of affairs in the QAS and the way forward. The most important virtues of any QAS – transparency and publicity – should be developed.	***NH EH***
Assure the effective communication and coordination between the central institutions involved in QAS (Ministry, Educational Council, the institutes)	***NH HH***
Put in place Education Management Information System	***MH EH***
Define and adopt the educational indicator system.	***NH EH***
Generate public discourse on the effectiveness of learning in schools (using TIMSS and PISA for such purposes might be instrumental)	***NH EH***
Standards	
Renew standards; improve their external cohesion and their cohesion with plan and program.	***MH HH***
Renew the plan and program and turn it into curriculum (outcome oriented tool).	***MH HH***
Make standards more visible and formal by placing them within carefully drafted rulebook Define standards that are missing (foreign language, social and civic competences, etc.). Avoid the use of standards in a way that will make teaching an overregulated process. Standards should not impair differentiated teaching and learning.	***NH EH*** ***NH EH*** ***NH EH***
Examination	
Assure the quality of the final exam procedure	***MH EH***
Reconsider the role and the function of the final exam. Stick to the rule 'one purpose, one test'. Currently, final exam seems to be both norm-referenced and comparison-referenced.	***MH HH***
National assessments	
Develop a coherent program of conducting national assessments (with identified areas and grades to be assessed, schedule, purpose, etc).	***NH EH***
External Evaluation	
Strengthening the capacities of external evaluators, including through additional training	***MH EH***
Establish coordinating units (department) in the Ministry of Education and in the Institute for Evaluation responsible for steering the external evaluation of schools	***MH EH***
Free external evaluators from all other duties (e.g. participating or running national development projects) and focus their responsibilities only on evaluation and advisory role	***MH EH***
Schools	
Information campaign in order to familiarize schools with educational standards and other QA instruments. Strive for reaching mutual understanding of their purpose and importance	***MH HH***
Invest further in training and showering materials to schools in regards to self-evaluation and school development (strengthen the organizational learning capacity of schools)	***NH EH***
Strengthen the school pedagogical, organizational and financial autonomy	***NH HH***
Professionalize the work of school principals	***MH HH***
Regulate the emerging market of external consultancy to schools	***NH EH***

The abbreviations stand for: MH – must have; NH – nice to have; HH – hard to have; EH – easy to have;

SLOVENIA

Table 20. Slovenia policy recommendations

SHORT TERM:	LONG TERM:
Strengthen cooperation between different stakeholders (policy-makers, politicians, inspectors, National Education Institute, research institutions etc.), as education quality depends not only on teachers, headmasters and schools; a solution could be organizing working coordination meetings between these actors regularly, every two months Clarify lines of responsibility between actors involved in the QAS Decentralize curricula further	Further the autonomy of schools and of teachers Special support to underperforming or small schools, including through the adjustment of the education funding system; The inspectorate-based QAS has proven to be incapable of controlling the quality of education and instead focused on the legality of school functioning; more peer-to-peer control and advisory systems, in cooperation with the National Education Institute, could be designed

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