



## Education Systems in Times of Multiple Crises: The Case of Post-Socialist Transformations

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 14 March 2017 Revised: 14 April 2017 Accepted: 21 April 2017 online: 1 June 2018</p>	<p>The transformation of post-socialist education is perhaps one of the most interesting developments in the history of comparative education. The collapse of the socialist system led to a series of crises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ideological crisis – the collapse of the socialist idea of education, partially replaced by the ideology of neoliberalism.</li><li>- Social crisis – dismantling of the socialist welfare system and attempts to replace it by different Western models of social welfare.</li><li>- Economic crisis – transition from planned to market economy which led to deterioration of educational infrastructure.</li><li>- Cultural crisis – socialist culture was replaced by different modifications of promoting national and/or regional cultures.</li><li>- Structural crisis – countries with practically identical educational structures chose different ways of restructuring education.</li></ul>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b> Educational Transformations Multiple Crises Post-socialist Countries</p>	<p>After the failure of the previous system Western researchers assumed that the common model of transition will be very straightforward – post-socialist countries should catch up with the more “modern” Western educational models. However, the transition did not follow the prescribed path and post-socialist countries have chosen different trajectories of educational development.</p>

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## Introduction

The end of the socialist system and the latter development of post-socialist educational models is perhaps one of the most interesting and at the same time insufficiently studied developments in the history of comparative education. The post-socialist educational area includes the republics of the former Soviet Union as well as the nations of Central and South Eastern Europe – the part of the world which occupies a vast area from the Baltic and Mediterranean seas to the Pacific and currently includes 30 countries. It's interesting to note that some of these countries have a common border with Iran. After the fall of the Berlin wall in year 1989 the trajectory of educational transition to many researchers both in the East and in the West seemed very simple and linear. The “underdeveloped” former socialist countries were supposed to modernize their systems of education in order to catch up with the contemporary educational ideas and to fit the standards of the more “advanced” West. Researchers based their belief on the assumption that “there is one Western educational model that needs to be replicated in the post-socialist countries and that there is only one way of implementing this model” (Bain, 2010). In other words, the application of modernization theory to education in this situation seemed quite rational and evident. The term “countries in transition” was applied to post-socialist region having in mind the transition from “failed” socialist system to a “superior” model of Western capitalism. The term “transition” implies the temporary nature of reforms, which should last until the process of changing one model into another is completed. More than a quarter of a century has passed since the collapse of the socialist system; however, today we have to admit that the process of transition is far from over. Moreover, it seems that at least a certain group of countries in the post-socialist world is not moving closer to the previously desired Western model, and in some cases the tendency is quite the opposite. What has happened and why? These are the research questions, which I am studying as an educational researcher during the period of last several decades:

- Why instead of convergence we observe the increasing divergence of educational systems in post-socialist area?
- Why the euphoria after the fall of the Berlin wall changed into concern, to a continuing series of crises, and, in many cases, to a disappointment?
- What is the future of educational systems in the region?

Before the collapse of the socialist bloc educational systems in countries of the socialist world

were identical or at least very similar. Ideological indoctrination, unified curriculum and centralized governance, state monopoly, teacher-centered learning with traditional methods of instruction were just few typical characteristics of the socialist model of education. Despite its authoritarian nature, socialist educational system had a series of advantages, acknowledged by their Western opponents: mass and free of charge education for all, substantially funded school infrastructure, quality teaching of subjects related to science and technology, well-developed system of vocational training, etc. However, with the collapse of the socialist system the time came to reform the model of education, which has seriously deteriorated during the last years of socialist regimes. Reforms in former socialist bloc countries started more or less at the same time – at the beginning of the nineties of the last century. Consultants and donors came also practically from the same global or regional organizations – the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, OECD, European Commission, etc. No wonder that all these countries received similar “post-socialist” reform packages supplemented with only few country-specific modifications. The rhetoric of educational transformation processes has been remarkably similar across the region, signaling a move from socialist education policies to more Western-oriented ones (Silova, 2009). Pace of the reforms could differ due to peculiarities of the political processes in each country, but the final result was to be expected more or less the same. However, that did not happen and this is perhaps one of the most interesting topics for comparativists to explore. Why? One of our assumptions is that the collapse of the previous social model led to a series of crises, the consequences of which are felt until now, though more than a quarter of a century has passed since the fall of the socialist regimes. Each country tried to find solutions to various manifestations of crises in its own specific way, which was determined by the previous historical, cultural and religious heritage, mentality of the people, interpretation of current global tendencies, etc. When social scientists dedicate their research publications to the difficulties emerging during the times of change, they usually tend to use a more sophisticated term “challenge”. However, we think that in this context the term may be misleading, because the scope of difficulties the countries faced was much greater. If the national economy is in ruins, it’s not a challenge, it’s a crisis. Therefore in our paper we speak about crises in education.

The multiple crises include:

- Ideological crisis – the collapse of the socialist idea of education, partially replaced by the ideology of neoliberalism.
- Social crisis – dismantling of the socialist welfare system, which post-soviet countries eventually tried to replace by different Western models of social welfare.
- Economic crisis – transition from planned to market economy led to deterioration of educational infrastructure and introduction of paid services and educational market.
- Cultural crisis – the promotion of the international socialist culture in education was replaced by different modifications of promoting national and/or regional cultures.
- Structural crisis – countries with practically identical educational structures chose different ways of restructuring education, which resulted in different levels of success.

### **1. Ideological crisis**

The dominance of the socialist ideology came to an end together with the whole socialist system. The idea of socialist upbringing of young generation and creating a new type of equity society, where there will be no social differences, was quickly and joyfully rejected by the newly emerging post-socialist elites. As a result an ideological vacuum emerged, which was not so easy to fill with a new contents. Countries which were more inclined to move towards the model of Western capitalism, mainly the countries of Central and South East Europe, eagerly accepted the global ideology of neoliberalism, which prevails in contemporary Western society. Neoliberalism - the current universal political economical paradigm - is often described as ideological “monoculture” and in the Western world is embraced by parties across the political spectrum from right to left (Wayne Ross, Gibson, 2006). Neoliberal ideology views education as a commodity, which is sold and purchased in a free market of educational services. Market-oriented attitude towards education evoked a series of educational reforms worldwide, many of which eventually led to numerous disappointments. Typical examples of this kind are introducing formula funding and league tables of schools, creating competition mechanisms in higher education, promoting paid educational services, etc. In order to cut public expenditures governments tried to reduce educational costs, often through economies of scale. Closing school libraries, reducing the number of special needs teachers, increasing class size, expanding online learning programs are examples. These actions intensify the work of teachers and isolate them from decision making and from one

another (Wayne Ross, Gibson, 2006). Despite of many negative consequences of liberally-oriented reforms a belief in market forces in post-socialist world is still alive and almost all recipes of Western experts are until now accepted rather uncritically. The typical explanation is “that there is no other alternative”, but is it really so? One can get an impression that both post-socialist policymakers and consultants from OECD and the World Bank are “more often guided by idealized Western models than by an accurate sense of their needs and capacities” (Silova, 2009). Local experts are often considered not competent enough, as they are not familiar with these models to the same extent as their Western counterparts. Local specificity is usually looked upon as irrelevant. Disappointment with neoliberal ideology in the Western hemisphere, especially after the world economic crisis of 2008, evoked discussions about the rise of post-neoliberalism. However, post-neoliberalism as a new global trend is still at the early stage of its development.

Other countries of the post-socialist world which are not so much involved in Western “modernization” project are looking for their own unique way of national development. Perhaps the most vivid example is Russian Federation. Contemporary Russia, disappointed with the Western way of social development, seeks to formulate ideological basis for the Eurasian orientation as an alternative to the previously favored Western integration. Belarus seems to be at ideological crossroads – trying to find a proper ideological balance between the Soviet past and Western modernization. Former republics of Central Asia rely on the ideologies formulated by their national leaders, which focus on building up their national identity. The problem for the countries of this region is how to ensure the ideological continuity. Experience of the past decades shows, that ideology tends to change together with the change of national leadership, as, for example, was observed in the case in Turkmenistan. The process of ideological choice in the region is not over. In our study we are not going to reject the ideology of neoliberalism, though it is subject to multiple critical judgements, as this is not the purpose of the present paper. Neither our aim is to rehabilitate the socialist ideology. We just want to state that the previous solid ideological background is lost and even nowadays we can observe no equally powerful ideology or ideologies capable of replacing it.

## **2. Social crisis**

The typical characteristics of the socialist welfare system were mass and free of charge education and health services, moderate but stable support after retirement, and practically non-existent (at least theoretically) unemployment. After the collapse of the socialist system

and introduction of the model of market economy the state could not continue to carry on the heavy burden of social obligations. Social welfare systems started to undergo essential transformations, which are not finished to date. Believers in the modernization theory think that eventually the social welfare systems will move towards one of the dominant Western models, namely, Anglo-Saxon liberal, Continental corporatist or Scandinavian universalistic (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Some authors also add a supplement to the original Esping-Andersen typology – the Southern European or Mediterranean model (Aiginger and Leoni, 2009). One of the researchers supporting the idea of approaching the already established models, Simonyi, observes that “after the first decade of CEE (Central and Eastern European) transformation the studies showed that the once rather similar universalistic (on a low level) and centralized social protection systems are diverging... Some of them resemble more to Continental/Conservative welfare regimes, others show more common features with Liberal/Anglo-Saxon models, others again with Southern/Mediterranean systems or with Social-democratic/Northern models” (Simonyi, 2015, 23). Our research also speaks in favor of such an assumption, as the Baltic states seem to move towards different Western models of social welfare (Želvyš, Jakaitienė, Stumbrienė, 2017). Other authors think that it makes sense to speak about a separate Central and Eastern European or post-socialist model of social welfare. For example, Cerami and Stubbs (2011) assume that the post-socialist countries do not fit into the three-type model, and there is a rationale to consider the post-socialist region as a separate case. Aidukaite (2004) maintains a similar view, stating that a critical analysis of the main social security institutions has supplied evidence in favour of identifying the post-socialist regime type that is already gaining acceptance within a comparative welfare state research. No matter whether we accept the convergence approach or tend to view post-socialist social welfare regime as a separate type, the point is that the social welfare systems in the region are still in the process of transition and many people living in these countries feel socially insecure and uncertain about their future.

Despite the common tendency of lack of trust in the systems of social welfare, post-socialist countries demonstrate different levels of social development. One of the indicators is the Human Development Index used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite statistics of life expectancy, education and income per capita indicators. According to the HDI, post-socialist countries fall into three different categories – very high human development (HDI 0,800 or higher), high human development (HDI 0,700 to 0,800) and medium human development (HDI 0,550 to 0,700).

Rank	Country	HDI
1.	Slovenia	0,89
2.	Czech Republic	0,878
3.	Estonia	0,865
4.	Poland	0,855
5.	Lithuania	0,848
6.	Slovakia	0,845
7.	Hungary	0,836
8.	Latvia	0,830
9.	Croatia	0,827
10.	Montenegro	0,807
11.	Russia	0,804
12.	Romania	0,802
13.	Belarus	0,796
14.	Bulgaria	0,794
15.	Kazakhstan	0,794
16.	Serbia	0,776
17.	Georgia	0,769
18.	Albania	0,764
19.	Azerbaijan	0,759
20.	Bosnia and Hercegovina	0,750
21.	Macedonia	0,748
22.	Armenia	0,743
23.	Ukraine	0,743
24.	Mongolia	0,735
25.	Uzbekistan	0,701
26.	Moldova	0,699
27.	Turkmenistan	0,691
28.	Kyrgyzstan	0,664
29.	Tajikistan	0,627
-	Kosovo	No data available

Table 1. Human Development Index (UNDP, 2016)

We can observe that the republics of the former Soviet Union fall into all three categories. The Baltic states demonstrate a very high level of human development, while Moldova and three Central Asian republics – Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – fall into the category of countries with medium human development. In this example we can trace no signs of convergence - on the contrary, the differentiation among the countries in spheres of life expectancy, education and income is increasing.

### 3. Economical crisis

Post-socialist countries experienced significant economic decline after the collapse of the socialist economical model. Initial economic transition from planned to market economy was accompanied by a popular belief that the introduction of market economy via the neoliberal „shock therapy“ would lead to a quick and smooth closure of the wealth gap with the West. A decade later the dreams were over (Sokol, 2000). „Shock therapy“ didn't bring the expected results and the gap still remained significant. However, slow and partial economical transformations, or attempts to secure elements of the socialist economy, the most typical example of which is Belarus, did not bring any better results. Judging from the current perspective, swift and radical transformations, or „shock therapy“, chosen by most of the Central European countries, seem to have been a better option. Economists note, that in order to secure smooth economical transformations a kind of „Marshall plan“ was needed for the post-socialist economies – a purposefully targeted massive foreign aid conditioned upon cooperation among the recipient countries that could have encouraged productive investment and regional integration (Ivanova, 2007). However, Western countries were not ready for such enormous investments and mainly limited their input to funding of separate aid programs, like Tempus, Tacis or Phare, and providing consultancy and expertise in the field of market economy. Central and South Eastern European countries, which during the first decade of the XXI century became new EU members, eventually acquired an opportunity to strengthen their economies with the help of the EU funds. Non-member states were deprived of this privilege. Central Asian republics experienced the most difficult times, because during the previous socialist period they were strongly subsidized by the central government of the Soviet Union. All of the newly independent nations of the southern Caucasus and Central Asia entered a period of massive economic decline, resulting from the loss of traditional economic networks and the end of budget subsidies and transfers from Moscow (Silova, Johnson, Heynemann, 2007).



Rank	Country	International \$
1.	Czech Republic	34,711
2.	Slovenia	32,885
3.	Slovakia	30,632
4.	Lithuania	29,966
5.	Estonia	29,365
6.	Poland	27,811
7.	Hungary	26,681
8.	Latvia	26,031
9.	Kazakhstan	25,264
10.	Romania	23,626
11.	Croatia	23,596
12.	Russia	23,163
13.	Bulgaria	19,199
14.	Belarus	18,060
15.	Azerbaijan	17,253
16.	Turkmenistan	16,881
17.	Montenegro	16,854
18.	Macedonia	15,121
19.	Serbia	14,512
20.	Mongolia	12,220
21.	Bosnia and Hercegovina	12,075
22.	Albania	11,929
23.	Kosovo	10,066
24.	Georgia	9,997
25.	Armenia	8,818
26.	Ukraine	8,272
27.	Uzbekistan	6,514
28.	Moldova	5,334
29.	Kyrgyzstan	3,551
30.	Tajikistan	2,980

Table 2. GDP per capita, PPP (purchasing power parity) ranking (World Bank, 2016)

The period of economic decline is not over and there are no hopes that the situation will significantly improve in the nearest future. The scope of the economical crisis and different outcomes of economical transitions can be illustrated by vast differences, which emerged among the former Soviet republics, which just a quarter of a century ago constituted a single country – Lithuania with almost 30 000 international \$ (GDP per capita, PPP) and Tajikistan with almost 3 000 international \$ (GDP per capita, PPP) (World Bank, 2016).

Economic difficulties in post-socialist countries influenced heavily the scope of educational funding. Education in a former socialist system was considered a state monopoly and was one hundred percent funded from the state budget. However, emerging economic hardships did not allow to respond in a full extent to the budgetary needs of the countries. Lack of budget funding led to deterioration of previously well-developed educational infrastructure. Kindergartens, schools and institutions of higher education had to find means of survival or otherwise they were forced to close down. In the new era of market economy one of the ways of survival was introduction of paid services and development of educational market. Full-fee paying students make a significant part of the student population in most of the countries. For example, in Lithuania government currently covers only about 60 percent of all higher education costs (Statistikos departamentas, 2016). State institutions of higher education are forced to cover other costs by providing different forms of paid services. It's an essential shift in approach to education, which is psychologically rather difficult to accept for most of the population as the older generation still remembers the times when all higher education was free of charge.

#### **4. Cultural crisis**

The socialist ideology promoted an international socialist culture, which was supposed to praise the achievements of socialist economies and highlight the advantages of the socialist way of life. Party leaders of the socialist states considered culture an important domain of ideological struggle and secured a relatively significant part of state funding for this purpose. Representatives of culture and arts enjoyed a special status in a socialist society and constituted a privileged part of the soviet elite. Favorable attitude towards socialist culture led to establishment of numerous cultural centers, theatres and schools of art throughout the country. Besides clearly ideological orientation, strong state support allowed artists to create important masterpieces of visual arts, music and literature. Of course, dissident artists did not enjoy the privileges granted to their “official” colleagues. Often they were forced to work in

the conditions of underground or had to emigrate to the countries which did not belong to the socialist bloc.

With the collapse of the socialist system the situation changed dramatically. New governments had neither intention nor funding opportunities for continuing the previous tradition of supporting artists and cultural institutions. Many of the cultural centers, especially in the provincial towns and villages had to close down. Schools of art for children could no longer rely on state subsidies and were forced to start offering paid services. Theatres also had to earn their own living and switched to popular commercially-oriented plays, which could secure sufficient income from mass audience. Similar situation developed in the domains of music, cinema and other fields of art. Being deprived of the state support, cultural institutions had to reorganize their activities on a commercial basis, which meant complete domination of the mass culture over the traditional national or elitist culture. After the worst years of the economic decline were over, governments in most of the countries partially returned to the policy of supporting culture; however, the support is not as generous as it was during the socialist years.

When we speak about cultural crisis, we have in mind not just funding. It's also about the contents. The declared internationalism of the socialist culture was replaced by "returning to the roots" – back to the national cultures. Religion regained its power after the period of the socialist atheism, and currently plays a significant role in cultural development. In this respect we can observe different cultural regions, where Western Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), Eastern Christianity (Orthodox) and Islam prevail. In each of these regions the process of "returning to the roots" is different. However, post-socialist countries, especially in Central and South Eastern Europe, also experience strong influence of contemporary Western mass culture. Worldwide mass communication led to a diffusion of cultural norms from the powerful centers, mainly from the Western world. The impact of such transnational norms is especially strong in the sphere of consumption, but they are also present in other areas of life (Rasmussen, 2003). National cultures, which experienced a period of revival after the collapse of socialist internationalism, currently face a new challenge of the global mass culture.

## **5. Structural crisis**

Structural crisis was mainly triggered by implementing hasty and not sufficiently theoretically grounded structural reforms. The specific traits of post-socialist reforms were: ideological and political rather than scientific argumentation, strong focus on structural issues and high speed

of the transformations, leading to an almost complete systemic and structural change (Rado, 2001). Countries with identical or at least very similar structures started moving to different directions, some of them decentralizing their systems (Central and South Eastern Europe) and some retaining strict centralized state control (Central Asia). Some countries reintroduced a highly selective general education system with early differentiation of curriculum, while some other countries stayed with a more comprehensive model. Western “experts” who offered universal recipes for all countries of the region, also contributed to the creation of a structural disbalance. A typical example is the policy of consolidation of schools, or “optimization”. The demographic situation in post-socialist area varies greatly: while in the Baltic states, for example, one can observe significant decrease of the population due to the low birth rate and economical migration to the more prosperous Western European countries, the Central Asian countries experience a rapid increase of young people of the school age. However, the recipe provided by Western consultants was the same in both cases – consolidation of educational institutions. The Kazakh program for the “optimization” of the school network, which was implemented from 1995 to 1998, led to a closure of many education establishments, particularly in rural areas. The declared purpose of the program was to “optimize” expenses for the maintenance, operation, and administration of education institutions by means of enlarging school classes and liquidating “cost-ineffective” institutions. As a result many children in rural areas of Kazakhstan were left without easy access to education (Silova, Johnson, Heyneman, 2007). An interesting structural experiment was observed in Turkmenistan. After Turkmenistan became an independent country, the length of time spent in primary and secondary education was reduced to nine years. The reform significantly reduced the scope of school curriculum and complicated the entry of Turkmen students into foreign universities (Bohr, 2016). Chances to enter local universities were also reduced as only those who had completed two years of work experience after leaving school were allowed to enter higher education. Courses at this level were reduced to two years. Situation improved after the change of the country leadership. Since 2007 the period of higher education was extended from two to five years and the ten-years long compulsory secondary education was restored. Finally in 2013 a twelve-years long education model was introduced in the country. Of course, in this particular case Western consultants are not to blame as this was a purely national experiment, inspired by the country leadership of that time. However, it illustrates the importance of personal preferences of the ruling elites in choosing ways of educational development. Other post-socialist countries also experienced significant

transformations in the field of higher education, Some countries quickly switched to a three level study model (Bachelor-Masters-Doctor) while some others tried to retain the previous model hoping that it will fit somehow into the Bologna process. As a result a number of countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan) managed to develop a curious mixed systems of higher education, where the old model coexisted simultaneously with the old one. In Kazakhstan, for example, the defense of the old-type candidate of sciences dissertations for a certain period of time coexisted together with a new type of defense of a PhD thesis. A possibility of establishing private higher education institutions in a number of countries led to an abundance of small private universities and colleges with few students, minimal infrastructure and doubtful quality of teaching. Mass education replaced the former elitist and highly selective higher education model in practically all post-socialist countries. Vocational education, on the contrary, suffered a significant decline due to the closure of large industrial enterprises – structural change which happened as a result of replacement of planned economy with a market-oriented one.

Some countries demonstrated capacities of implementing successful structural reforms. Estonia was a real success story as it managed to rearrange its educational system much in accordance with the model of the neighboring Finland. The results are really impressive – in recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study Estonia is among the top 10 countries and in some cases even demonstrates better result than the initial model country Finland (OECD, 2016). Of course, we understand that PISA results should not be considered as an ultimate indicator of successful educational model. Many critics indicate the disputable value of PISA results and lack of solid theoretical and methodological basis (Grek, 2012, Jakupec and Meier, 2015, Želvys, 2016). However, education experts who promote modernization agenda in post-socialist countries, usually indicate positive PISA results as one of the proofs of the fitness of national educational system for the contemporary global market, which in fact means approaching the desired Western standards.

## **6. Conclusions**

Different ways of overcoming the crises led to choosing various trajectories of educational development. As a result of different strategic choices countries of the region can be classified into three relatively different groups: EU member states, non-EU member countries with orientation towards EU membership, and countries that have been not necessarily drawn on Western European references for reforming their education (Silova, 2009). The new EU

member states evidently had the best possibilities of overcoming the transition crises, as they were experiencing and still experience strong influence of the EU education policy. They also receive significant assistance for their reforms from various EU funds, which were partially available even before the accession. Some authors believe that for this group of countries the process of transition is finished and that the EU accession “ended the East-Central European countries’ race for the restoration of their identities or their re-formation” (Kozma, 2016, 34). However, we tend to think that the process is far from over as there are differing views on creating identities within the group of the new member states. The second group consists of countries, which are ideologically and politically divided, e. g. Serbia, Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine. One part of their societies (and territories) is in favor of EU integration, while the other part is tending to maintain the existing status quo. These countries have problems even with educational statistics (when describing the model of education and numbers of students how we should count Ukraine: including Crimea or excluding Crimea? Moldova: including Transnistria or excluding Transnistria? Georgia: including Abkhazia or excluding Abkhazia? Serbia: including Kosovo or excluding Kosovo?). Of course, the same controversy may be observed while considering the competing philosophies of education. Most of these countries had armed conflicts on their territories, which hindered their economic development and evoked numerous social problems. In this particular group of countries one may also observe attempts to build a new system and simultaneously secure elements of the old one. Divided consciousness of their societies finds its reflection in divided systems of education.

The third group is a wide array of countries without clear ideological and educational vision (Želvys, 2011). Undoubtedly, one of the most interesting cases is Russia, which, after the ultimate disappointment with the Western model, tries to find its own “Eurasian” way of development. Another interesting case is the republics of Central Asia, which, differently from the first two groups, were never involved in any kind of European integration. These countries are also influenced by the global reform agenda, however, they find plenty of space for broad interpretation, and local reforms tend to take different trajectories, often completely diverging from the officially articulated educational goals (Silova, 2013). In other words, Central Asian republics are still at the educational crossroads. Actually they have to build their own visions instead of borrowing them from the West. Neoliberal ideology is a typical Western product which does not fit historical and cultural traditions of the region. However, attempts of finding the most fitting ideological basis so far are not very inspiring.

What is the future of education in the region? In spite of the assumed impact of globalization, most probably the differences between the three groups of countries will be increasing, as well as the differences within the groups. All countries are influenced by the ongoing processes of global educational transformations. However, internal differences seem to play the dominant role in tracing the trajectories of further educational development. Global tendencies are subject to local interpretations, as local leadership often tries to justify their own actions and policy decisions by referring to them. Though references to the global educational agenda are quite common, it does not necessarily mean that they are perceived as an ultimate set of guidelines. One should bear in mind that the term “globalization” is often used as a catchword without a precise content but with many connotations (Rasmussen, 2003). Judging by the experience of the last several decades, it seems that the rhetoric of globalization and evaluation of its impact on education is rather exaggerated. On the contrary, isolationistic and protectionist tendencies are observable recently in economics as well as in education throughout the world. In spite of the isolationistic tendencies within the EU (e. g. Brexit or the “rebellious” newcomers - Poland and Hungary), most probably the new EU member states will predominantly demonstrate the course towards further integration and continue to develop their education systems within the framework of common EU policy. The second group of countries will continue to seek for the ways of solving their ideological as well as territorial conflicts. The key task for them will be internal integration of education systems within the country. EU membership for countries like Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine is unlikely at least for the period of the nearest future, therefore they will be much less dependent on the influence of the EU education agenda. This group of countries will respond to the EU guidelines and recommendations in a selective way and will consider that there is much more space for interpretation. The third group of countries will proceed with searching of their individual ways of development. Most probably, Russia will continue its recent course of the confrontation with the West and will try to find as an alternative some unifying ideological base for the Eurasian Economic Union, which currently also involves Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It's a very ambitious goal, which will be extremely difficult to implement, because there are not so many ideological affinities, perhaps, besides the common socialist past, which could unite all these countries. Countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and, most probably, Azerbaijan, will continue to rely their own independent education policy, and here we can foresee a possibility of interesting education reform experiments in the future

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