

## **CONTROVERSIES ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT PROJECT “A COMPUTER FOR EVERY CHILD”**

### **Some for porn, others for better**

For some, a classical case of money laundry, a failed project and wasted budget means. For others this is a perfect idea, which is a step away to becoming alive and introducing the young Macedonian generation into the world of modern technology. The Government project “A computer for every child” faces controversial reviews. The praise comes exclusively from the persons implementing the project, however, not by the foreigners. Why, if it is about a successful project, does the Government hide the data on the amount of money spent for purchasing the computers and the accompanying equipment? – It is not about computerized teaching. The computers which have not been stolen or broken, meaning the ones containing all parts, were used by students for watching porn movies during classes – says the revolted acting Principle Arben Ademi, who describes the situation in the secondary school “Panche Popovski” in Gostivar.

As a result of that, he moved all the computers received from the Government through the project “A Computer for every child” from the classrooms. Piles of demolished computers are locked in one of the classrooms. Keyboards with missing keys, broken monitors, demolished mice, empty hardware towers. The missing parts are either in someone’s houses or re-sold. The view is awful, the damage is enormous.

### **I WILL BE BEATEN IF I PUNISH**

Within the frames of “Pance Popovski” are the regional schools in Rostuse and in Negotino and along with the secondary medical school there is a total of 3200 students. Approximately 2200 computers were delivered and they were received by the former principal.

- When I took over this position, I did not find a single computer. The former principal told me that he was keeping them privately in some warehouse. When he brought them in order to carry out the stock count and takeover, the number was surely half of the computers he had received at first place. I assembled a commission comprising of IT specialists, we did the stock count and I separated the useable ones. The rest of them were broken, with stolen parts. At present there are probably around 1000 useable computers. There might be more useable monitors. I have

information that there is a criminal charge against the former principal. I do not know by whom. I requested directions from the Ministry of Education on how to protect the computers from stealing and damaging. The reply was – find your own way. Students study here in three languages, in two shifts, the students change classrooms in order to attend classes, so we really did not have a manner to protect them – says principle Ademi.

In the school there was an intention to conduct a trial on whether computerized teaching would function. A person from the Ministry of Education came and installed the computers in only one classroom and only for students of one nationality. One day there were no students attending classes in that classroom, so students from another class came and damaged the computers immediately.

- I understand cases of breaking, but pulling out all of the keys from the keyboards, I have not seen that. Even if I catch the ones who have done that, I can not expel them from the school because secondary school is obligatory. If I punish them, the parents will come and beat me. We caught a student with a knife at school, and the Police – nothing. We requested from the Ministry to block use of USBs and CDs, because students watch porn materials during classes. There is no reply. The Internet access to those sites has been blocked, but the students bring USBs and CDs. That is the reason why we removed the computers. I have received an order from the Ministry to return the computers on several occasions, but my reply was that I would not install “porn movies” – explains the revolted principle Ademi. In this school there are 95 classes with 3150 students and 187 teachers. Although this bad condition was found in practice, damages at this school are not the worst ones. According to the Head of the State Education Inspectorate, Gogre Arsov, the situation is even worse in the schools in Skopje.

- the greatest damage happened at the high school “Josip Broz-Tito” in Skopje – more than 2.5 million denars, i.e. around 41,000 euro. In comparison, the total amount of damage in all schools is 277,341 euro – says Arsov.

## **EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL**

As opposed to this ultimately pessimist picture, there are positive examples which bring hope that the enormous amount of money spent for computers at schools will not fail completely. The high school “Slavco Stojmenski” in Stip is an example that computers at schools not only can remain not stolen, broken or damaged, but they can be a useful teaching tool. Risto Petkovski, who has been a school principle for longer than 20 years, says that he has used his reputation. He does not have a problem with stealing and breaking – his worries are different – to find a better position for the computers in the classrooms so that the teaching process can become interactive, as foreseen by modern trends.

- All computers are used in the teaching process for all subjects. Nothing has been stolen, nothing has been damaged on purpose. The school received the computers about two years ago, among the first schools in the country. We installed a total of 504 working stations for 870 children. The Minister of Information Society announced the start of their use. We installed Internet, and the teachers had a training course in “Edubuntu” – says the principle Risto Petkovski.

Although announced, the Government, meaning the Ministry of Information Society has not purchased relevant software for each subject. – There is not separate software, but we are using the computers during everyday teaching for every subject. We also received laptops for the teachers and they are using them – says Petkovski.

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**Vladimir Locev – Natali N. Sotirovska**

### **School Principles in front of investigative judges**

The principal of the high professional agriculture school “Mosa Pijade” in Tetovo is supposed to appear before an investigative judge because students from his school have been breaking computers. The criminal charges were pressed by the State Educational Inspectorate followed by evaluation of damages in all schools in the country. For some of the principles minor charges were pressed and for some, like the principle of the high school in Tetovo – criminal charges were pressed. Depending on the scope of damage. – The charges imply that I am responsible for a damage of about 189 thousand denars. I was invited to give a statement before an investigative judge, although we had already compensated for the damage – says the principal of the high school in Tetovo, Pero Gligorov.

In this school, for two and a half years, since July 2008, the majority of 180 computers with 1050 monitors, keyboards, mice have been kept locked. There are computers installed only in the two specialized classrooms for information technology and machine studies. The rest of them have been kept in the library in order to avoid damages. The teachers have attended training courses at the FON University for the Linux program. Only about 37 computers with 120 monitors are in use for the curriculum for all professional subjects. For physics, chemistry and the rest of the subjects – they are not used.

- We work in two shifts and there are about 2000 students. It is difficult to control such a number of students. When the external testing starts, we will reinstall them – says the principal Pero Gligorov.

#### Responsibility and blame

The State Educational Inspectorate and the Government have agreed: the principals were guilty for not finding a manner to protect the computers from stealing and damaging.

- The principals' excuse is that they did not have any rulebooks and instructions on how to protect the computers. However, like the way they protect the rest of the schools' property, they should find a way to take care of the computers. We decided for the principles of schools were damage was lower than 100 000 denars to have minor responsibility, and above this amount – criminal responsibility. And we pressed charges. We addressed an indication to the mayors and the school boards, meaning it was not an order on how to act, but an indication by which we informed them on the conditions. It is up to them to decide to express dissatisfaction with the work of the principals. Until present we have not had any information that someone has taken radical measures and that some principals have been dismissed, but there have been discussions following the information. Our goal is to inform the school boards on principals' performance – says the head of the state Educational Inspectorate Gorge Arsov.

According to him, immediately afterwards, in 50 schools measures were taken for protection of computers.

- We indicated that damages had to be compensated from the school's own means. In cases the damage was too high, the municipality was to assist. We also addressed a conclusion that they had to insure the computers. We said, the damage was under no circumstances to be charged from the students. A student could be charged only in case he/she was caught breaking or stealing and in case there was a minutes of the act, which means if there was a certain procedure going on – explains Arsov.

However, the computers at the majority of schools are not in function. They are waiting for better times in secured rooms at schools. Instead of showing off that by the process of computerization the teaching process has been improving, the principals “compete” in whose computers are better protected and whose students steal the parts and break them less. Angelina Nefitovska, assistant-principal at the secondary professional technical school “Gostivar” in Gostivar says that only a part of the computers have been installed, and the rest of them have been removed from classrooms in order to protect them from damages and are kept in one room.

- We are one of the best schools regarding the protection of computers. We have not had cases of stealing. There have only been cases of breaking keyboards and mice. We have introduced special rules for protection of computers and the Ministry of Information Society uses them as an example for the rest of the schools – she says.

The principal says that two years ago the school received 138 computers and 805 monitors.

- They are used for automatics and computer techniques. Every teacher knows how to use the computers and uses them while teaching. For instance, I am a teacher of Macedonian and during a class we “enter” the page of the novel’s author, we read, we discuss. The compositions set as homework are sent to me via e-mail by the students. Five out of seven teachers of Macedonian language practice this. The computers in use have been installed in two classrooms – says Nefitoska.

Between cameras and Internet

There are different cases as well. The Principle of ES “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk” in Gostivar, Gulgait Emini, says that they received desktop computers for the older students and the laptops for the younger ones and they have placed them on the “government” desks and chairs, which were purchased immediately after it had been noticed that standard desks were too small for both computers and notebooks. Last year the necessary installation for the computers was made. However, the computers are waiting in the chemistry classroom. Internet needs to be installed.

- The idea “A computer for every child” fails at the very beginning – finds the principal of the ES “Vasil Glavinov” in Veles, Asen Prlichkov. And he explains: - we received 113 laptops for the teachers and 370 laptops for the students at lower classes. We also received about 400 personal computers, which have not been used so far. They are kept at the defectologist’s office for security reasons. We are waiting for a team from the Ministry to install them. The training courses for the teachers have not been initiated yet, too. Nothing has been initiated. There are not enough computers for all students at lower classes because we have one laptop for every two children. I think that this project is not going to be functional, because we have been practicing interactive teaching for 10 years now, and by introducing computers and their installing we return to the classing manner of teaching.

The Principal of the ES “Orce Nikolov” from the village of Injevo near Radovish, keeps computers locked. In a warehouse.

- They will remain there until a security solution for the school property is found. The computers were installed, but we had problems with their safety. We installed 16 cameras, and after classes we hired security at the school. And we also redecorated the school. The electric installation for the computers is ready, but we have problems with Internet. I do not know why. We have

intervened on several occasions to the Ministry of Information Society, but there has been no reply – says the principal Mite Jovanov.

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### **A different Macedonian language class**

Neologisms in daily press. Macedonian language class. Students divided in groups are preparing a presentation for the assigned project – the use of foreign words accepted in the Macedonian language in the daily newspapers.

“incident, dement, invest, union”..A group of students have prepared a Power Point presentation to demonstrate the words they had found in a daily newspaper. The other students, the teacher and the team from “Dnevnik”, are monitoring the presentation on computers. At the secondary professional municipality school “Dimitrie Cupovski” in Veles the computers have been installed and are a part of the teaching process. According to their experience, the computers can be damaged more if they are not in use.

- During the time of the previous management of the school, damage of 194.000 denars was made. The damage was compensated from the school’s own funds and from the students who had stolen parts from the computers or damaged them. There were cases of stealing computer parts while they were not in use. The clicks were broken and the keys were demolished. In order to protect them, we placed protection buttons on the computer towers. The students themselves are responsible for the computers, thus they, meaning the particular class will pay if they are damaged. The teaching process is conducted through computers, however not always. The same building is used by the secondary chemistry school. The students at the Gymnasium and the Chemistry school have separate folders in order to differentiate the students’ work – says the principal Valentina Joveva.

### **Burglars not informed**

Laptops have been stolen from the elementary school “Cholja” in the village of Chajle near Gostivar.

- We placed metal bars on the windows on the ground floor. However, the burglars entered from the second floor. They opened the doors of the rooms where we keep the laptops

violently, as well as the lockers in which they were placed. On 10<sup>th</sup> December last year we received 56 laptops. 45 were stolen. They were either taken across the border or were stolen only in order to make problems at the school – says the principle Arita Agai.

The computers are not in use here, too. There is no installation for them. They are kept at the IT classroom, because there is a metal door, so it is difficult to break into.

### **The Government does not know how much money was spent, either?**

Twenty, thirty, fifty, a hundred million euro... tax payers can only speculate on how much the Government spent in order to computerize elementary and secondary schools. Besides permanent requests and accusations by the opposing parties, the Government has never given any information on how much the citizens of Macedonia have paid for the project “A computer for every child”

The transparency of the Ministry of Information Society is even more worrying. As opposed to the information by the Government that around 160.000 computers have been purchased, the Ministry does not reply to that issue either.

How many computers have been purchased so far for equipping elementary and secondary schools? How many of them are personal computers and how many are laptops? Is a new purchase planned, meaning are all schools fully equipped? What is the total worth of the purchase? How many suppliers have been selected and who are they? Why were they the successful bidders – was the price or the quality the main criteria? Were the teachers and professors trained to use computers? Does the Government pay for the training (and how much does it cost)? Are computers used at schools, to what extent are they used and for what, for which subjects? Has special software been purchased for conducting classes, as it had been promised? Why was the operational system Lynux chosen, and not Windows, the most famous and the most commonly used one?

These are the questions “Dnevnik” submitted in writing to the Ministry of Information Society, which remained without a reply. The Minister Ivo Ivanovski accepted to answer them, and then changed his mind. The explanation was that he was on an official trip. Although we agreed to wait for him to return, his secretary’s reply remained unchanged. Instead of receiving answers from persons legally responsible to answer, we had to look for answers via alternative routes.

### **Without Macedonian companies**

Based upon an approximate evaluation, around 160.000 computers, purchased in two turns, were paid more than 32 million euro. The amount does not include the price of the laptops purchased

later for the first to fourth year pupils and teachers. It does not include the expenses for electricity and Internet installation, nor desks and chairs, which were additionally purchased because it was seen that the monitors were too big for the present desks. Many people find the amount and the successful bidder selection criteria disputable, and especially the fact that a big number of computers are still “laying” packed in the schools’ warehouses and are losing their value.

- The primal project for purchasing 100.000 computers was planned to cost 8.5 million euro; however, it ended up costing 24 million euro. There was a call for purchase without previously providing electrical and telecommunication infrastructure at schools. Additional money was received from Telekom with TK-infrastructure, from EVN for the electricity, and on top of everything, PE “Makedonska Radiodifuzija” announced a call for proposals for communication infrastructure although it has nothing to do with it – says Jani Makraduli from SDSM.

He finds disputable the fact that Macedonian companies were unable to win the call for proposals because of exceptionally difficult conditions. – And it was all because of a winner known in advance. The most important issue is that the Government did not purchase 100.000 computers, it was admitted by the Minister Ivo Ivanovski too, but 18.800 computers and devices offered by only one company – says Makraduli.

It is the case because there are six monitors connected to one computer. In June 2007, the Minister of Education at the time Sulejman Rushiti stated that the Chinese company “Haier Company” offered the best conditions for purchasing 100.000 computers through the call for proposals. Details are missing. The university professor Tale Geramitchioski, former deputy minister of education, and then SDSM Member of Parliament, made an analysis of the Government project.

- According to the budget proposals for 2007 and 2008 and their re-balances, 540 million were foreseen for purchasing computers at schools, then 560 million denars more, i.e. a total of 18 million euro for both years. There were several appeals to the call for proposals and the decision making process was delayed, so that afterwards a Chinese company was selected, which delivered 20.000 computers in several turns. They use the “Lynux” operational system. Why that system was selected, we never got an answer.

The computers were kept in warehouses at some schools and the customs terminals for about 9 months, and afterwards, distribution to schools was initiated in a non-transparent manner. We never saw the operational plan on criteria for distribution of computers to schools, neither the dynamics of their networking and including in the teaching process. There were funny situations in practice – there were contingents of computers brought to schools in rural areas, they were left there without a possibility to be installed due to old electrical installations, lack of adequate space for keeping the computers and alike – says Geramitchioski.

## **Number – the most important**

The price of a personal computer remained a secret although through questions asked by members of Parliament such information was requested on several occasions.

- The assumption is that the price was 20.000 denars per piece, and the central units slightly more. The first 18 million euro were increased several times due to increase of expenses for connecting the equipment, additional networking equipment or similar activities. For exact data the budgets in 2008 and 2009 need to be seen, however, since in the meantime a Secretariat for Information Technology at the Government was formed, which has its own budget and which took over a big part of the project “A computer for every child” realization in terms of the Ministry of Education and Science, I believe that even the ministers do not know the exact data, and the Government even less. Then, there is the money from international aid through projects by USAID, UNICEF and the bilateral assistance from the embassies of Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Sweden – says Geramitchioski.

Last year the Government purchased about 65.000 new computers, although more than 40% of the previously purchased 100.000 computers, due to inappropriate infrastructure and electrical network in bad condition are not in function. The Ministry of Information Society says that it is about the second phase of the project and that the computers were intended for elementary schools. The cost of this purchase remains a secret as well.

Unofficially, it is over 10 million euro.

Announcing the project at the end of 2006, the vice prime minister at that time Zoran Stavrevski said that by purchasing 150.000 – 180.000 computers Macedonia would no longer be in the group of countries with relatively low level of information technology equipment of schools with about 50 students working on one computer. He announced that starting from the next year the students in year five at elementary schools and students in year one at secondary schools would attend electronically conducted classes.

- The project “A computer for every child” in a relatively short time will elevate Macedonia to the group of countries like South Korea, Finland, Malaysia, Singapore, which have a high percentage of presence of computers in education – said the corresponding minister at that time Rushiti.

### **Improvised teaching**

However, not only were the computers at the majority of schools uninstalled at all, and in case they were, they were stolen and damaged, but the electronic teaching is still missing. Teachers

using computers during classes are improvising. The adequate software for each subject has not been purchased.

- Software is of crucial importance for using ICT in education. It is important to have equipment with additional infrastructure, software support and trained teaching personnel. Equipment with adequate infrastructure was provided in a way. Training of teachers, which was interrupted, continued in 2008 (but not for specialized software, because it has not been purchased). There are several ways for creating appropriate portfolio of necessary software for teaching. They are at some instances offered as commercial packages, like MAT LAB for mathematics, AUTOCAD, CorelDraw and alike for drawing, GOOGLE EARTH for geography, educational programs for biology and chemistry, music, using data from Internet through Wikipedia... there are also a lot of electronic dictionaries for studying foreign languages through audio-visual techniques through multi media. There are a lot of possibilities which do not cost a lot of money. Through the Secretariat of Informatics about 1000 software packages were purchased in 2005 of authorized "Windows" and "MS Office". There is a will by "Microsoft" – USA as well as other leading software companies to assist for a solid software package, which will be used directly in the teaching process – for educational and not commercial purposes – says Geramitchioski.

According to him, the failure is a result of poor preparation for the project. Without appropriate preparation of infrastructure and adequate projecting of the necessary network of computers per number, type and networking, as well as lack of software for using the computers in the teaching process and inadequate training of the teaching personnel for using special software are the basic reasons for the fiasco.

In 2004 and 2005, supported by USAID, 4000 teachers at elementary and 4000 teachers at secondary schools were trained on basics of information technology. – That tendency was supposed to continue in 2006. But with the change of government, the project was discontinued although USAID was willing to provide material-technical and professional assistance for information training of the overall teaching personnel. Negotiations for purchasing educational software for the youngest students were initiated. These negotiations were interrupted too. On the other hand, because the software package "Edubuntu" – a parallel of "Windows" is used on the operational system "Lynux", chosen by the Government, there was a need for all teachers having passed the training once, to get acquainted with the basic principles of "Edubuntu". For these purposes, an open call for proposals was announced and the successful bidders were PMF and FON University. The teaching personnel faced completely new software, which caused troubles even for those with higher level of information technology knowledge and are actively using "Windows" – says Geramitchioski.

### **They do not know a foreign language, still teaching**

The researches in 2003/2004 showed that a great part of teachers do not have even elementary knowledge of a single foreign language, and especially the English language. Because of that, in 2004/2005 a training for basic, intermediate and advanced courses in English for the teachers was initiated. The training encompassed 4000 teachers at elementary and secondary schools, although there were prerequisites for its widening.

- The age and qualification structure of teachers is inappropriate. More than 50% of teaching personnel are at the age of above 59, 30% have higher education and are not interested in computers – says Geramitchioski.

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