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The Prime Minister Mihai Tudose
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Berlin, 10. Sep. 2017

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

It has come to the attention of the EEPG (European Educational Publishers Group, www.eepg.org) that the Romanian Government is going to introduce the unique textbook and that this textbook will be produced by one single publishing house. While we know that several letters have already been written to you on this subject, we would like to add a few arguments for the beneficiaries (students and teachers) of any educational system. We hope you will find the time to assess these arguments.

The EEPG is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advance of education. It has members in 22 European states. In none of these states the unique textbook exists, even though there have been several attempts to introduce this.

Why is this the case?

Education, teaching and learning, has to take into account the individual child or student. Their different abilities have to be catered for. Therefore, we have different methods in teaching as well as learning. Each school should be able to choose the learning materials that are best for their students. One book can never pay justice to all the different types of teachers or learners. But giving each child the same chances must be one of the major goals of education. This however, is not achieved by giving them all the same materials. Traditionally, educational publishers provide a variety of materials. The government should approve of them and facilitate the schools with the means to choose from an approved selection but not dictate the use of one textbook. The expertise of the teams that develop teaching and learning materials inside the different publishing houses is an invaluable asset that will get lost once the state oversees all production of books.

Why is it detrimental to good education to have just one textbook? Or to put it another way: Will the "only one textbook for each subject" policy influence the performance and knowledge of students?

Yes, it will. In countries where there is such a system now, PISA, TIMSS results etc. are normally not as good as in countries where there is a free or semi-regulated textbook market. While the quality of textbooks is only one small part of the whole education system, it does influence the performance of students. One of the worst examples is Mexico, where textbooks have been written and produced by the government since the 1990s. Still, Mexico underperforms regularly in PISA. If the theory that one textbook guarantees that all students have the same chances and that governments can guarantee the best materials, the opposite should be the case.

So, why isn't this the case?

There are several reasons, besides the obvious political one: If a government changes, often the focus on education also shifts, new people become responsible for the content of textbooks. However, even if educational policy is stable and textbooks are not biased, there is the problem of up-to-dateness. Books are not revised regularly because there is no pressure from the competition. There is no need to revise misconceptions and the quality of printing etc is not an issue. A positive example is Singapore – they always are top of the list in all comparative studies. In Singapore, originally all books were published by the government but the market is more open now. The government recognized that there are specialists who can do the job better – educational publishers. Books have to be approved by the government – which is also the case in most European countries, but publishers can submit and often work with the government to achieve best results.

What should be done? How should the government ensure that Romanian students and teachers get the best education possible?

- Clear guidelines and an up-to-date curriculum that reflects the needs of students, teachers and the country as a whole are needed to be able to compete in Europe. PISA and TIMSS result depend on many factors, not only textbooks.
- A healthy competition in the textbook market ensures that the publishers and their expert teams of authors, editors and designers put every effort into producing the best possible materials at a reasonable price.
- There has to be ample time for tenders to make sure that time and resource pressure does not harm quality of books and material.
- Last but not least: Governments have to invest in teacher training – a good teacher is the only guarantee that students will understand what is being taught.

The EEPG hopes that the Romanian Government will reflect on the points mentioned in this letter. We would be happy to advise and give best (and worst) practice examples from around the world. The future of each country depends on the education of its citizens.



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