

# Reflections on the Sofia Seminar

The following points, dear ECNAIS friends, are a classification of the thoughts that I had the opportunity to share with you, during the Sofia conference in November 2015. It was an effort to correlate briefly the points made by the head of the Greek delegation, Mr. George Linardatos, about the current situation in Greece, with the presentations we had attended during the seminar.

- We can clearly see **similarities** between the challenges that we are all experiencing. However, there are differences: the **influence** of liberal ideas on the principles of society, legislation, even common beliefs, varies. My Greek colleagues and I could provide you with additional facts that would be mind-blowing for your countries and schools. Absence of public funding, **overregulation**, inability to choose educational staff, state **hostility** against private schools are everyday issues that we have to cope with.
- **Ms Stoyanova**, speaking as a **parliamentary** member, yesterday (19/11/2015), stated that Bulgarian private schools usually gain the first positions in national tests. Furthermore, she attributed this to the **dedication of the teachers**, and the **freedom of entrepreneurship** of the owners. This is something you would rarely hear from a member of the administrative or political staff in my country, so I consider it impressive!
- **Professor Ignatov**, as a former member of the government, has given us a brief outline of the history of the educational system in Bulgaria. Many aspects sounded familiar. The main similarity is that education has been used as a tool to form national identity. This is common to Balkan countries that used to be under the Ottoman rule. Evidently, at some point in history, probably during the 19th or 20th century, there was a challenge: how can you distinguish the populations and form a solid identity? A heroic history, some myths, some ancestral achievements, we have all been down this path: Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, and FYROM. And every attempt to reform or liberalize the educational system has caused a reflex back home that this very identity would be in peril. Professor Ignatov had to fight against the inertia of the administrative apparatus, which has been inherited by the communist era. However, he has managed to obtain equality for private schools in terms of funding and freedom. Our system is also structured the same way the Bulgarian system has been described: a single goal to enter university and afterwards staff the state mechanism. I have the impression that, although my country hasn't been formally through a communist

regime, we are actually living in a quasi-communist vicious cycle. Any attempt to reform has to fight against administration, political will and common myths. So, I am impressed -and somewhat jealous- by the fact that educational policy in Bulgaria is more liberal than in my country.

- **Professor Nikolaeva** has introduced us the founding fathers of Bulgarian education. Although their ideas were introduced some decades ago, they resemble so much to what we now call 21st century skills.
- **Professor Bancheva** told us a lot about the Act that has been recently voted. I am happy for the friends of the Bulgarian association that they have the challenge to implement many innovative things.
- Polyphonic classrooms: **Professor Desthe's** lecture. Professor has asked us on our reflections and ideas. My comment is that polyphony and dialogue is of greater importance these days when we are in rapid transition to a multicultural society that has to adopt, comprehend and tolerate. And your goal, the goal to educate educators to implement the polyphonic classroom is needed as never before.
- This morning's visit to schools has been an eye-opening experience: we visited a beautiful Bulgarian independent school with specialty in mathematics, I had the chance to see a prosperous private school and a thriving community. Students were very much involved in their school.

It is always a great **opportunity** to share **experiences** with European countries and especially with our **neighbouring** ones: although we share borders, we rarely have the chance to share experiences. So, I would like to thank the Bulgarian Association for this opportunity, for their hospitality and for the wonderful seminar.

There is much to be discussed and this makes a great lead-in for our next conference. ECNAIS seems to have a special preference for Balkan conferences: as you know, the next one will be held in Athens and it will be a **pleasure** to meet you all there.