

### **The inherited context**

Greece became an independent nation state by late 1820s, after a long and destructive war against the Ottomans. The nascent state was small in size with a few small towns and a large number of villages. Its economy was mostly agrarian with small holdings and pasturages composing the backbone of agricultural production (Dertilis, 2005). The extended family constituted the nucleus of economic and social life providing the necessary manpower, ensuring the stability of social relations and offering protection and security to its members (Veremis, 2006). Generally speaking, provincial notables and men-at-arms had the upper hand in local affairs, while central bureaucracy was still in the making (Petropoulos, 1997). In political terms the war of independence had failed to produce the undisputable leader the country was in great need of (Veremis, 2006:123). Localism, civil disobedience and patronage pervaded political life (Koliopoulos, 1997). Instability and turmoil in the political system – especially after the assassination of the first governor of the state by a chieftain – led the three Great Powers to appoint Otto, the son of the Bavarian king, as the first king of Greece and consequently to impose a new administrative layer of Bavarian regents, courtiers, officers and advisers upon an undisciplined people who persistently refused to come to terms with their authority (Ιστορία Ελληνικού Έθνους).

It was in this context that the construction of the education system began. Education was expected to produce the cadres, public administration was in great need of. It was also expected to provide the doctors, lawyers and teachers badly needed by the society. It was expected to reduce extended illiteracy and expurgate the Greek language that had been corrupted over centuries of foreign occupation. In a word, education should help bring the country into the upcoming era of modernity (Mattheou, 2007). Central to this enterprise was the development of national identity; the transformation of the deeply felt sentiment of belonging to a cultural community into nationhood (Kitromelidis, 1997). After all nationalism was the order of day for all 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Davies, 1997).

In this concern, education in Greece was faced with additional difficulties. In the first place domestic intellectual forces were weak after centuries of Ottoman occupation. Greek intelligentsia mostly lived abroad, either in European states or in the Konstantinople, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire and See of the Ecomenical

Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church (Vournas, 2005). For many among the veterans of the war of independence these people were simply a foreign body and were seen with great suspicion.

Secondly, there was no consensus as to what the fundamentals of the national identity should be (Diamantouros, 2000). There were those, mostly adherents of the European Enlightenment, who envisaged the nascent nation state to be the direct and legitimate heir of ancient Greece. After all, so the argument went on, contemporary Greeks lived in same old places some of which still bore their ancient names, they walked across the ruins of ancient temples and they spoke the same language. The revival of classicism in Europe and the romantic recollection of antiquity favoured such thoughts (Veremis, Koliopoulos, 2006 : 44)not least among the influential political and diplomatic circles in Europe (Davies, 1997). On the other hand such an approach was expected to bring – at least symbolically – contemporary Greece closer to the West, whose enviable modernization could also be traced back to the classical antiquity through the benevolent impulse of the Enlightenment. Yet, there were also those who objected. Certain influential ecclesiastical, political and intellectual circles had never forgiven the treacherous and subversive role of the West in the decline and fall of the Byzantium Empire. To their way of thinking the Schism was not merely ecclesiastical but also cultural; the anticlerical, irreligious, liberal and individualistic ideals of the West were seen with great suspicion (Mattheou, 2007).

Thirdly, education had also to care for the strengthening of national identity among the large Greek populations that were left after independence outside the small nation state, in areas like Asia Minor, Macedonia and Thrace. These communities of the Greek diaspora demanded teachers for their children to teach them the Greek language and history (Kitromelidis, 1997, Mattheou, 2007). Such demands further depleted the already limited financial, administrative and human resources of the country.

Finally, all those crucial decisions on education were to be made by the Bavarian administration, which had the upperhand in education as in the other sectors of public life (Svoronos, 1976). Despite objections and criticisms voiced by several Greek educationists, as to the compatibility of foreign models with Greek education and social realities (Ragavis, 1999), the regency proceeded to the enactment of three laws during the 1830s that led the foundations of the Greek system of education. Its characteristics reflected the historical circumstances – both domestic and international

– and the preferences of the Bavarian administration. In a sense the provisions of these laws constituted an uneasy compromise between alternative views which although it allowed for continuous controversies and legislative swings it inaugurated institutions that proved to be durable over the decades (Dimaras, 1973).

The structure of the education system was linear. Children could start with the elementary, the so called *dimotiko* school at the age of six and after six years they could proceed to the six-year *gymnasion* (the secondary school). No technical-vocational alternatives were provided. Those willing and able could then join the University of Athens, the only higher education institution not only in Greece but also in the Balkans. Two things deserve our attention here. The first refers to the democratic structure of the educational system (Mattheou, 2007). Contrary to Western European traditions the elementary and the secondary schools in Greece constituted consecutive steps in a single and unified educational ladder and not two separate and exclusive educational sub-systems open to different social groups. Irrespective of their social background children were invited and expected to proceed together through the same educational route. As a matter of fact public mentality considered the youngsters from low-income families to be more motivated, capable and hence deserving to pass successfully through the education system (II). No additional examination barriers were erected between primary and secondary education. The second worth mentioning characteristic is that elementary education, as early as 1834, was *de jure* compulsory for six years. Parents neglecting their duty to send their children to *demotiko* were threatened with fines (Laws of 1834 & 1880).

The democratic character of the education system could be attributed to the influence of the ideals of the Enlightenment among the Greek revolutionary intelligentsia. Such liberal and progressive ideas can be traced back in the early proclamations of the revolutionary national assembly in 1822 (Greek Parliament, 1971). It could also be attributed to the lack of a landed aristocracy / nobles (Mattheou, 2006) as well as to the fact that education provided great opportunities for social mobility (Tsoukalas, 1975). The large number of available places in public administration and in the professions provided the necessary motive to the state – and certainly to the families – to open up the education system.

The system was closely administered centrally through a network of inspectors. This was partly an expression of its democratic character – common education and equal access of all should be safeguarded by the state – but mainly it

reflected the priorities of the day: the development of the unified national identity, the fight against disobedience and corrupt political localism and the overcoming of the extensive lack of trained teachers and other professionals. Later on, when the infrastructure of the system had improved centralism remained, mainly to make sure that the state could protect the socio-economic establishment against subversive ideologies and assertive educational movements, especially in difficult times like the mid-war period or during the post-civil war hard decades (Noutsos, 1986).

Even the University which in principle enjoyed academic freedom and autonomy had on several occasions experienced the undue intervention of the state (Fasoulis, 2005, Mattheou, 2008). The state thus retained a firm grip over all aspects of education. Laws, decrees and circulars determined every detail concerning the school curriculum, the training of primary school teachers, the appointment, promotion and in service training of all teachers, the every day running of schools and of other educational institutions and the financing of education. No change could be introduced into the system unless it had the approval of the political authorities. Thus, over the decades education had acquired certain settled characteristics. For one, the curriculum – certainly the secondary school curriculum – grew to be ethnocentric, literary, encyclopedic and theoretical in its context (Persianis, 2002) and organized in terms of distinct disciplines with due emphasis to fundamental scientific principles, laws and phenomena. Teaching methodology was based on chalk and talk techniques, while the textbooks and examinations played a central role in the actual development of teaching practices.

Primary school teachers were trained up to mid 1980s at teacher colleges (originally at the secondary level and since 1933 at the post secondary but non-university level) whose curriculum and operation were directly supervised by the state. Secondary school teachers were university graduates, yet their training on the one hand, based as it was strictly on distinct disciplines and with no pedagogical instruction, and their vocational status as civil employees on the other did not allow them great latitudes for independent professional action. Finally, education had never experienced days of affluent funding. Despite public appreciation and political appraisal, education had always been the poor relation of the state budget.

### **Major reform episodes in the Post-World War II Period**

It was against the aforementioned inherited context that Greek education developed in the post World War II period. A convenient way to follow its development would be to divide this period in two sub-periods. The first starts in late 1940s after the end of the Civil war and ends in 1974, after the collapse of the seven year dictatorship (1967-1974). It is understandably an era of reconstruction, both economic and socio-political. The national economic infrastructure was almost totally destroyed after two consecutive wars (the World and the Civil wars together lasted for nine years). A large number of the population in the countryside had fled into the major cities to avoid political persecution or had emigrated to northern Europe, USA and Australia in search for a job (Mazower, 2003, Veremis, Koliopoulos, 2006, Kazakos, 2001, Tsaousis, 1971). The political system suffered the consequences of the civil war with the Communist party outlawed, some of its members in exile or imprisonment, with emergency laws to dispute the Constitutional Order and with the personal political convictions to determine employment in the public sector (Manesis, 1986, Meynaud, 1966, Elefantis, 1994). Things would gradually improve by early 1960s. By 1964 centrist a political party would resume office with a clear intention to proceed to education reform. Its term of office however would be short. The government would be toppled from power in 1965 and a coup d' etat would follow in 1967. Thus, the seeds of reform had to wait till 1974 and the restoration of democratic order before they grow.

1974 marked the beginning of the second post-war period. Between 1974 and 1981, with a liberal-conservative party in power, major political and economic changes took place. A new liberal Constitution was voted; monarchy was abolished, the army returned to its barracks and all emergency laws were abrogated; all human rights were ratified. The political life returned to normal, despite the tense political atmosphere and the strained political culture. The Communist party was legalized while a new socialist party with majority bend was created, Greece joined the European Economic Community in 1980; its GNP increased despite the yawning wound of the arm race with Turkey and the first steps towards the development of a welfare state were taken.

Education too became the focal point of reform activities. Liberal forces demanded the resolution of issues the 1965 reform episode had failed to settle. The Left, capitalizing on its energetic role in overthrowing the dictatorial regime, was out for more radical change. The vocabulary of social justice, equal opportunities, social

reconstruction and increased political rights was introduced into public discourse with an intensity and a grandiloquent manner, the political system had never witnessed in the past (Mattheou, 1980). For a number of years since 1974, and despite its internal inconsistencies and equivocalness (Kazamias, 1978), this vocabulary was about to become hegemonic in educational discourse.

Yet the conservative political forces in power between 1974 and 1980, as well as the society as a whole – still very much worried about the possibility of a new military coup – were not prepared for radical reform. They could only consent – and this not without great difficulty and reservation – to the adoption of some of the main reform policies of 1965, which for most commentators were long overdue (Dimaras, 1966) and which in any case had failed to turn a sympathetic eye to the illiterate, the geographically underprivileged, the minorities and the women (Eliou, 1966). Thus:

a) The six year *gymnasio*, the secondary school providing general education to elementary school graduates that could pass successfully the entrance examinations, was divided into two consecutive three year schools: the *gymnasio* (the lower secondary) and the *lykeio* (the upper secondary school). Both schools continued to provide general education, yet the former became part of compulsory education.

b) Changes were introduced in the curriculum. Two were the more significant among them. The first was the institutionalization of *demotike*, the everyday language of the people, as a means of instruction at all levels of education. This provision of the reform had come to resolve a long standing issue which had been hotly debated in the country for over a century. For many resolution of this issue had long matured, especially since over the years *demotike* “had made considerable progress toward establishing itself as the language of almost all intellectual fields” (ΔΔ 212). Or, as the Minister of Education of the time had put it: “we did nothing more than to adopt a nationally welcomed linguistic reality” (212). Through the use of modern Greek translations and consequently by placing more emphasis on the content rather than on the grammatical and on the syntactical dimensions of the ancient text, as it used to be the case in the past. Changes in other aspects of the curriculum were left at the discretion of the Minister and of his institutional advisors. Thus, on the one hand the strong state control of the education system was once more reaffirmed, while on the other the very essence of the curriculum, namely its traditionally humanistic, classical, intellectual and ethnocentric character, was actually left intact, although one should not perhaps underestimate the long term significance of the policy makers’ fair words

about the contribution of education to the enhancement of the values of democratic life.

As regards higher education, the tertiary level witnessed two major changes. First, it was the establishment of new universities, the expansion of the existing ones and the institutionalization of the so called Technological Education Institutes, institutions of non-university status. These policies came as a response to the alleged needs of economic development but mainly in order to satisfy the increased public demand for higher education (Mattheou). Demand for university education had always been high in Greece, even since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Tsoukalas, 1975), and the massification of secondary education during the 1960s and early 1970s had increased it further. Competition among candidates for a place in the university, especially in its popular schools of Medicine, Law and Engineering, has ever since been fierce, and increasingly leading to intensive private cramming courses during the last two grades of the *lykeio*.

The second major development relates to the students. On the one hand the massification of higher education led to the development of large student audiences with highly diverse interests and cognitive skills and exhausted the existing human and material infrastructure of universities. On the other student participation in the fight against the dictators led to the overwhelming strengthening of the student trade-union movement. Many among the academic community – especially students and low-ranking academics – together with the political parties of the Left were pressing for major reforms in the administration and generally of the university and in the re-organization of research and teaching practices, to which the government of the day was not willing and prepared to proceed (Mattheou).

More drastic reform action at all levels of education had to wait till the 1980s. To some extent reforms during this period were the outcome of important changes in the socio-political and economic context of education. In 1980 Greece had joined the EEC and its economy had to adapt rapidly to the new circumstances. At the same time, while the world was gradually – and on several occasions grudgingly – moving in the direction of the market economy, of the revision of the post war socio-economic settlements and of the abolishment of Keynesian policies, a new socialist government – with undertones of laicism and of preferences to the Third world development model (II) – came in office with a large majority. After decades of right wing party rule the new government had a rather long and radical agenda to accomplish. During its first

four year term in office the new government followed aggressively revisionist policies: In foreign affairs it retained a cautiously negative stance towards the NATO alliance and an assertive outlook *vis a vis* EEC. In the economy it followed statist policies and appeared hostile to private sector initiatives. In an attempt to redistribute national wealth it resorted to large salary increases, thus increasing foreign borrowing. In the political sphere it restored all those that had been politically and socially marginalized during the post civil war years of persecution. In the social sector it went on with building new welfare state institutions, among which the National Health System stands out.

In education it passed three major laws that are mostly still in force (II). The first, chronologically, upgraded primary school teacher education: new university departments were established in the place of the old post-secondary teacher colleges which were abolished. The second law (II) changed the internal structure and governance of universities. The institution of the chair was abolished; all members of staff could thereafter enjoy autonomous teaching and research. All university authorities were to be elected with the participation of all academics, administrative staff and student representatives. Courses would be organized on a semester instead of a yearly basis and the curriculum would be enriched by an increased number of electives. The third law (1566/1985) incorporated earlier policies and introduced new ones, all concerning pre-tertiary education. Changes included new curricula and textbooks for primary education; a new comprehensive type of school – the Polykladeko Lykeio – that would function in parallel with other types of schools – at the upper secondary level in an attempt to bridge through it the gap between general and technical-vocational education; a new examination system for access to higher education and the establishment of new public post secondary institutes – the *metalykeiaka preparaskevastika kentra* – for the preparation of those university candidates that would be unable to cover the cost of cramming courses themselves; the abolishment of the school inspectorate and the institutionalization of school consultants that would provide guidance and help to teachers; a new type of in-service training of teachers that would take place regionally rather than centrally; the organization of a “participatory” and “democratic” system of educational planning aiming to enhance the involvement of all interested parties. Clearly, the reform was extensive, some of its aspects could be considered as radical in the Greek context, and its fundamental principles reflected the idea of social reconstruction and of



autonomous economic development that constituted the corner stones of the party's political manifesto. According to the Introductory Report of the Law, "education is a fundamental social process" that "should not therefore be cut off contemporary scientific pedagogical trends and current social, economic and cultural circumstances". Instead, it should become "a matter of interest for all the people" thus contributing, on the one hand, to "the wane of the consequences that different economic, social and cultural circumstances bear upon" individuals, and on the other to the achievement of the "goals of autonomous social and economic development of the country".

Extensive in scope and ideologically unilateral the new policies was only natural to arouse political reaction. All those that felt ideologically and/or politically deposed – among them the right wing party, the academic establishment and various conservative circles – strongly opposed the law. Yet, it was not so much their reaction that hindered and on some occasions prevented the implementation of the law. The tides of neo-liberalism and the waves of globalization could not leave the party's socialist ideology and its romantic vision of autonomous development intact. Thus, reform lost momentum. Only some of its provisions managed to take roots, especially those concerning the university and the primary school curriculum. Some among the rest were not really implemented (eg. those concerning the in-service training of teachers), some of the new institutions were abolished after some years (eg. the comprehensive upper secondary school and the post-secondary preparatory institute), while others (eg. participatory measures) fell into disuse.

By early 1990s a new reform agenda was constructed including issues of at least two types. First there were those issues which related to the problems that emanated from the general ideological swing of the times. The second included issues generated by changes in the broader national and international context of education. Consecutive liberal and social-democrat governments attempted to tackle them, not always with much success. Thus, most of them still linger over the political system and pervade contemporary public discourse. But, before examining them critically and in some detail we would better proceed first to the provision of an overview of the main aspects of the system as it now stands after the various amendments of its fundamental architectural style over the last twenty years.

### **The structure of the education system (Diagram 1)**

Education in Greece starts at the age of five with the kindergarten, which since 2008 is part of compulsory education. The prevalent type of state kindergarten employs one or two teachers and functions only on week days from 08:15 to 12:15. All-day kindergartens employ more teachers and extend their programme up to 16:00. Attempts are being made to compensate for geographical inequalities in the provision of pre-school education.

Day nurseries for younger children are also available, especially in major cities, for those working parents that are unable to entrust their children to the care of grandparents, a state of affairs quite common – yet of a decreasing nature – in Greece. Excessive demand is covered by the private sector, which offers pre-school education under the strict supervision of the Ministry through its regional administrative bodies.

Primary education starts at the age of six, it is compulsory, it lasts for six years and is divided into six grades. The prevalent type of primary school is *Demotiko*, operating from approximately 08:15 to 13:30. Since 1997 a number of primary schools – they operate in parallel with ordinary schools – operate with an extended timetable and an enriched curriculum; they are the all-day *demotika*. There are also a few experimental primary schools as well as special schools for the disabled, the Roma and for the repatriated and foreign pupils providing intercultural education. In addition special programmes for foreign students function in a significant number of regular primary schools. For Muslim minorities in Thrace, schools for the minority operate providing instruction in Greek and in Turkish.

Promotion of pupils in the primary school from one grade to the next takes place if, according to the opinion of the teacher, pupils meet the rather loosely defined evaluation criteria of mastering the knowledge corresponding to their grade. In cases of major learning difficulties the teacher in consultation with parents may decide that the pupil should repeat the grade.

The number of pupils in a school determines the number of servicing teachers in it (one up to twelve teachers). In remote small islands a teacher may provide instruction to only a couple of pupils. On the contrary, in very small inland villages pupils normally commute to the nearest large village or town at the expense of local authorities. Normally, in a school with a large number of pupils one teacher is in charge of one class unit, in which the number of students should not *de jure* exceed 25. In schools with fewer pupils one teacher may be in charge of pupils attending two

or three or even six different grades. Primary school teachers in a typical school teach all school subjects, apart from foreign languages, physical education, music and art which are normally the responsibility of specialist teachers. Lessons begin on September 11 and end on June 15. Christmas and Easter holidays last for two weeks each.

Compulsory education continues (and is concluded) at the *gymnasio*, the lower secondary school, comprising three grades and providing general education to all. Teachers in it are all university graduates, specialists in one discipline, although in case of need they are obliged to teach subjects other than their own field of speciality. Promotion of pupils from grade to grade is not automatic. However class repetition is not very frequent. Further to the regular *gymnasia* there are also a few other types of lower secondary schools: the ecclesiastic, minority, intercultural, experimental, musical etc., along with special *gymnasia* addressing pupils with special educational needs.

After graduation from the *gymnasio* the pupil is awarded a certificate and he / she is thereafter in a position to choose among three alternative routes. He / she may join the labour market – sometimes after a study of two to four semesters at the upper secondary technical-vocational school EPAS or at the post secondary IEK – or alternatively to register without entry examinations or any other limitation to either the vocational *lykeio* (EPAL), or to the general *lykeio*, the upper secondary school of general education. EPAL, EPAS and General *Lykeio* are post-compulsory institutions. The latter comprises three grades. The first grade operates as a sort of orientation year with a general knowledge curriculum. The second grade includes three directions: theoretical, science, and technology. In the third grade, the technology direction is further subdivided in a) Technology and Production and b) Information Science and Services Course. As in the *gymnasion* teachers in it are subject specialists. The majority of its graduates seek a place in higher education, a really demanding competitive task which leads them to seek help in private cramming courses, thus distracting their attention from school and increasing family expenditure. Vocational *lykeio* too comprises three grades. The first grade comprises three directions: Technology, Services, and Maritime-Shipping Occupations. The second grade includes nine fields of study (Engineering, Electronics, Electrician, Building Works,

ICT, Economics and Management, Health and Welfare, Agronomy, Food and Environment). The third grade includes an even larger number of specializations. After graduation from it pupils may seek a place in the university through the same selection procedure as his / her counterparts of general *lykeio* or seek a place in ATEI, enjoying certain prerogatives in selection. On the other hand, pupils from EPAL after two years of study are allowed to attend the first grade of general *lykeio*. Studies in EPAS last for two years and are organized around specialization classes. Finally, a small number of specialist *lykeia* – *esperino* (four year evening *lykeio*), ecclesiastical, musical, experimental, special needs, etc. – continue to function at the upper secondary level.

The school year starts for all types of school on September 11 and ends on June 30. In morning-schools (in cases there is a shortage of school buildings, school may function at shifts: morning and afternoon) courses start at 08:15 and end at 14:00. In the afternoon courses they start at 14:15 and end at 20:00. In evening schools courses are delivered from 19:20 up to 22:55. (Evening courses last for four years).

Tertiary education comprises universities and Institutes of Higher Technological Education (ATEI). At the non higher education sector of tertiary education there are also the so called Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK). There are 23 universities functioning in the country including Polytechnic Schools, the School of Fine Arts and the Greek Open University. Some are old and some are actually nascent. They all enjoy the same status, although some among them, like the university of Athens, Thessaloniki, the Technical University of Athens and the Economic University of Athens, have a world wide reputation. According to Article 16 of the Constitution, University education is provided exclusively by institutions which are fully self-administered legal entities of public law.

The university authorities include the Rector and three Vice-rectors, elected by the academic staff, student elected representatives and electors from the administrative staff. The Rector chairs the Senate, which comprises the chairpersons of all Departments, the Deans of Schools and a number of elected members of the academic staff. Universities fall under the supervision of the State and are financed by it. With the exception of the Open University, there are no fees for undergraduate students, while text books (normally one to two per subject) are also provided free. All students are entitled to free health care until the end of their studies and enjoy

reduced prices in public transportation means. Undergraduate courses last for four years with the notable exception of the School of Medicine (six years), Engineering (five years) and Dentist (five years). University entrance is based on highly competitive exams, especially as concerns Medicine, Law, Engineering and Business Administration Schools and more recently Departments of Primary Education. Since early 1990s post graduate courses at the MA (one or two year duration) and the PhD level (**minimum of two years**) are in full progress.

In academic and administrative terms the Department is the main operating unit which covers a Discipline's field of knowledge. The General Assembly of the Department is competent, *inter alia*, to determine its overall educational and research policy; to plan and revise its curriculum; to formulate the strategy of its development, and so on. The curriculum is organized on a semester basis and comprises compulsory and elective courses. Students are assessed on the basis of written or oral exams and/or on the basis of assignments, laboratory or seminar work, which are marked from zero to ten (the passing mark is five). Failing students in a subject are allowed to resit for it (in the three examination periods, namely February, June, and September) for a practically unlimited number of times. To graduate, students should accumulate a specified number of credits.

The academic year begins on September 1 and ends on August 31 of the following year. It is divided in two semesters, each normally subdivided into 13 full weeks of classes and a maximum of four weeks for examinations (Winter semester: October to end of January, February exams, Spring semester: March to May/June, June exams) plus an additional exam period on September. Each course is usually taught for three to four hours per week.

There are some 15 ATEI in the country. They have gradually developed from post-secondary institutions in the late 1960s to higher education institutions in the 2000s. ATEI are also self-administered legal entities under public law, supervised and financed by the State. Most of the regulations pertaining the administration, the structure and organization, the studies, etc., of the university hold good for ATEI. Generally ATEI enjoy a lower status in academic terms compared with the universities and they are not as attractive to candidates as the latter.

Over the last decade, efforts that have started in the 1980s have been systematized and a new system of continuing education and training for adults has been developed. This project is part of a broader strategy to develop human capital

and to combat unemployment and social exclusion. There are two main types of education in this area: the Second Chance Schools (SCS) and the Centres for Adult Education (CAE). SCS concern young people over the age of 18, who have not completed compulsory education and provide them the chance to acquire the Compulsory Education Leaving Certificate that will help them to fit smoothly in the social, financial and vocational structures. Curricula are particularly flexible, so that they respond to the young people's individual needs and they place special emphasis in the acquisition of general knowledge, the learning of a foreign language as well as the development of personal and technological skills. The total duration of the programme is two years and the timetable is 21 teaching hours plus 4 hour workshops per week.

The task of CAE is to give through educational and training programmes the opportunity to all over 18 years of age individuals to update and upgrade their knowledge and skills and to acquire new contemporary knowledge and skills. In the over 56 Centres operating in various cities, adults have the opportunity to attend courses in various fields (e.g. Greek language- history, ICT, business, culture, etc) lasting from 75 to 250 hours. After an evaluation, graduates receive a Certificate of Lifelong Education for programmes lasting from 100 to 250 hours and a Certificate of Training for training programmes up to 75 hours. Within this context of lifelong learning there are also in operation Schools for Parents, Centres for Distant Lifelong Learning-Adult Education, and Prefectoral Committees for Adult Education. Participation in all these programmes is free of charge.

Post-secondary non tertiary education comprises the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK). Their objective is to provide any type of vocational training, whether initial or supplementary; to ensure relevant qualifications for trainees through the provision of scientific, technical, vocational and practical knowledge; and to enable them to develop the respective skills so as to facilitate their vocational integration in the labour market. There are state as well as private IEKs all over the country providing specialized skills in a number of fields. In general, adults having a Leaving Certificate from *gymnasio* as a minimum certified degree may study in an IEK. IEK issue two types of certificates on the basis of the duration of the course, of the level of courses attended by trainees (two or four semesters of training) and of the level of their basic education.

Finally of a yet ambivalent status are the so-called Centres of Liberal Studies, private post-secondary institutions that claim to provide university education. Some among them are attached to foreign universities – basically English – on franchise arrangements. These institutions came under the supervision of the Ministry of Education only in 2008 (they were till then under the loose supervision of the Ministry of Commerce) and the certificates they issue are recognised as university degrees only by the private sector of the labour market and not by the public sector or the professional organizations. The Greek state has been sentenced by the European Court for refusing to recognize the vocational rights of those students that graduate from those Centres that are attached to universities of the European Union countries.

### **The administration of the educational system**

Despite heavy criticism the administration of education remains highly centralized as in the past. The Minister retains all powers in policy making and decision taking. This holds good for important pieces of legislation as well as for the every day managerial aspects of running the schools and other educational institutions. Consequently all demands for change – or no change – are addressed to the central authorities causing a volume stress to the political system and to the educational bureaucracy, which very frequently and on major issues results in political confrontation between the Minister on the one hand and the teacher unions and students on the other. Teacher and student demonstrations, some of them really violent, is a common phenomenon when important issues are at stake, disrupting traffic and businesses in Athens – the locus of power – to the great discontent of all who live and work in the city. Common is also the phenomenon of pupils or students occupying their school or university building and obstructing instruction and laboratory work. These forms of assertive action certainly reflect the prevailing confrontational political cultural in the country and the substantial power the student movement acquired since 1974 as a result of its active participation in the fight against the 1967-1974 dictatorship. Yet, they are also the consequence of a centralized system of administration which does not allow for decentralization to act, at least on certain occasions, as a safety valve in difusing reform pressures and as a channel of communication between decision makers and the wider public, both in geographical and in occupational terms. Complaints, basically on the part of various localities or on the part of industrialists and of trade unions, that their needs are not being taken into

serious consideration and that the Minister decides without due consultation are quite common. Many commentators of Greek education tend to agree that the excessive power of the Minister has on several occasions led education to disarray. Policy making, they say, instead of responding to the needs of society has become the whim of Ministers who wish to leave their reform print in the history of education.

If change is the prerogative of central political authorities, day to day control of education is in the hands of central, regional and local educational authorities. At the central level the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH) is responsible for the administration of all schools in the country. The minister is seconded by two Deputy-Ministers, the General Secretary and three other General Secretaries, each responsible for Youth, Adult and Religious Affairs respectively. The administrative structure of the Ministry comprises a vertical hierarchy of Integrated Administrative Sectors, General Directorates, Directorates and Departments. There are also Agencies overseen by the Ministry that provide assistance in specific fields of competence related to the pre-tertiary education. These include, among others, a) the Pedagogical Institute, responsible for the curriculum and the examination of issues related to pre-tertiary education, b) the School Book Publishing Organization, responsible for the design and distribution of textbooks; no instructional material of any kind can reach the school unless it has the approval of the Pedagogical Institute and the Ministry, c) the School Buildings Organization d) the State Scholarship Foundation e) the Organization for Vocational Education and Training f) the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Centre, whose task is to rule on the equivalence of degrees issued by University Faculties abroad and g) the Centre for Educational Research. It should be noted that on certain occasions there is an overlap of responsibilities among these organizations; that their Governing Bodies are appointed by the Minister; and that the latter is not obliged to follow their recommendations and advice.

Administration at the Regional level is exercised by the Regional Education Directorates, at the prefectural level by the Directorates and the Primary and Secondary Education Offices. Their main responsibility is to administer and monitor the operation of schools. As the critics of the centralized system argue, these are the eyes, the ears and the long hands of the Minister. At the local level (municipality or community) School Committees are responsible for managing the funds allocated to cover operating expenses for local schools. Finally, at the school level the headteacher



is responsible for the smooth operation of the school, for co-ordinating school life, and for ensuring conformity with laws, circular letters and service instructions. The appointment of head teachers is made by Official Councils in accordance with pre-specified rules to safeguard against political interference.

It is clear that the school enjoys minimum freedom in decision making when it comes to important education aspects like the content and the organization of the curriculum, school textbooks, teaching methods, managing substantial financial resources, etc. This situation has been repeatedly criticized both by academics and by teacher trade unions, while consecutive governments have repeatedly promised to relax the firm grip of central authority. Yet not much has changed. This should be attributed to a number of reasons. The first and foremost is certainly related to the long standing tradition which considers education as a powerful mechanism of intellectual development, cultural enhancement and social control, that should not therefore be left to the discretion of nationally and socially subversive forces. Despite assertions to the contrary, the state and the social establishment seem to have never really put trust on teachers and on local authorities. On the other hand however, teachers themselves have never been very enthusiastic in practice to assume the responsibilities that emanate from a more autonomous role in school. This is perhaps partly the result of their initial training, which has not installed in them the spirit of professionalism and the skills related to independent planning, implementing and evaluating their work, and partly the result of accepting their lot as civil employees, who have therefore no reason to assume those additional responsibilities that come with professional undertakings. On several occasions that the state allowed for some independent initiatives at schools (instructive, cultural, artistic, pedagogical, etc.) through the so-called “flexible zone”, the majority of teachers rejected the measure on the grounds that this constituted yet another improvised state project that would simply increase the teaching burden on their part. On the other hand, although teacher unions have repeatedly asserted their preferences for a more decentralized system of education, they have never actually made it an issue worth fighting for.

Three final points should be made concerning the administration of schools. The first refers to private education and it is indicative of the firm grip of the state on education. Private schools operating in Greece have the same organization and operational rules as state schools and they follow the same curriculum (additional subjects may be included on the Ministry’s permission). State approval for the

creation and operation of a private school is mandatory, while state control is practiced in matters relating to the teaching staff, school buildings, number of students per class, etc. It should be noted that the majority of private schools are owned by private enterprises and only a few belong to non-profit legal entities. Apart from a small number of schools run by foreign monastic orders – which also come under state control – there are no schools run by the Greek Orthodox Church. Although influential when it comes to education, the Greek Church prefers to exert an indirect influence through the state apparatus. Finally, state and private schools share *de jure* and in the eye of public opinion the same status and co-exist peacefully without any major tension between them. It was only during the mid-1980s that the socialist government of the day waged a rather unsuccessful war – despite its self-complacent statement that it had managed to shrink private education by 30% within three years (Introductory Report to Law 1566/18-985) – against private education. Today, it is estimated that about ...% of pupils are enrolled in private schools, a percentage that has tended to increase slightly over the last few years mainly due to pupil occupation of state schools and the consequent disruption of the educational process and to a smaller extent due to the alleged – but never verified empirically – lowering of standards caused by the influx of immigrant children to state schools.

The second point refers to the participation of non educational actors to the running of schools. According to the law, at all levels of education provision is made for representatives from political life, the local community, parents and trade-union organizations to take part in planning and decision making in education and to participate in the administrative processes affecting education, when it comes to policy making. Yet, *de facto* many of these groups either show indifference, when it comes to policy making as is the case of the majority of individual parents, or are prepared to defend only sectional interests. For many students of Greek education this public behaviour is attributed to the traditionally weak civic society.

Finally, a word should be said for the administration of higher education. As already explained, universities are legal entities under public law, with full self-administration. Yet, they all come under the supervision of the Ministry, which sets down the legal framework of their operation, monitors their function and finances them. Apart from the formal relationship between the state and the universities one should not however fail to appreciate the informal relationship between the state and individual professors (II), some among whom are appointed to public posts and enjoy

several benefits in return for political and technocratic support to the government at all levels of public life, the control of the university itself included.

### **School curriculum**

As expected in a centralized system of education the design of the curriculum is the responsibility of the state which also supervises its uniform application in all schools in the country. The school curriculum is typically encyclopedic in structure, based on the traditionally held assumption that all forms of knowledge have something valuable to contribute – yet not to the same extent (Noutsos) – to the comprehensive development of children. It is generally organized on the basis of distinctive subjects, although initiatives have been recently undertaken to introduce an interdisciplinary approach to increase the time devoted to educational activities rather than to lecturing, to encourage active pupil participation and to enhance co-operative work in the classroom. In this context a new “Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework of Educational Programmes” has been designed, more room was allowed for school based initiatives and new area studies were introduced. Despite well meant intentions most educationists tend to agree that the curriculum, especially when it comes to its application at school, remains traditional in many respects. It continues to put emphasis on scientific theory rather than in practical applications; it is extensive in its content to an extent that it puts great pressure upon teachers and pupils who on many occasions cannot go through it in a meaningfully constructive way; the textbook prescribes teaching and contributes to rote learning.

In what follows information is provided concerning the curriculum of different levels of education.

### **Primary school curriculum**

Table 1 provides the standard timetable for primary education in terms of the weekly teaching periods per subject in all six grades. All courses are compulsory for all pupils, and teachers are obliged to follow the curriculum in terms of both its content and its stratification into levels corresponding to grades. Additional help is provided to pupils with learning difficulties and to those with special educational needs, while in all-day schools study preparation and ICT teaching are also added. Schools of intercultural education and for Minorities, as well as experimental schools are allowed derivation from the standard curriculum.

As one would expect, the emphasis is clearly in the teaching of modern Greek language and mathematics, while humanities and physical science have also their own share in the curriculum. One should not fail however to appreciate the time devoted, since 2006, to the teaching of two foreign languages in response to public demand and to the EU objectives, as well as the introduction of the “flexible zone” which allows for teacher initiatives to “promote the inter-disciplinary approach of knowledge through methodologies of experience and participation” and for the running of innovative projects like: the “Youth Entrepreneurship”, aiming to open the school to society and to economy, the “Melina – Education and Culture” programme, or to environmental and health education activities. Not all schools participate in these projects while the flexible zone initiative was not welcomed in many schools, as teachers felt ill-informed as to its aim and unprepared to make proper use of it due to lack of in-service training. On the other hand, due to the extent of the curriculum, to the increased requirements of mixed ability teaching (especially since a large number of immigrant children have flooded schools) and to the traditional priority teachers allocate to the teaching of language and maths, many among them tend to dislocate some of the hours scheduled for the flexible zone – even for aesthetic education – in order to enhance the general effectiveness of instruction.

Teaching methods are formally described but not prescribed by the Greek Pedagogical Institute. Teachers act in practice in accordance with their training and professional experience. Pupils are assessed on the basis of their daily oral examination and all-round participation, and of their results in specific assignments and, in the case of order pupils, on the basis of special tests.

### **The Curriculum of the *Gymnasio***

As in the case of primary education the curriculum and the timetable in all secondary schools (*gymnasia*, *lykeia* and EPAL) are drawn up and proposed to the Ministry by the Pedagogical Institute, which is also responsible for the approval of textbooks. Curricula constitute full guides to the education task clearly stating the goals for each subject, the materials to be taught structured into units and directions indicating the method and teaching aids for each subject. Textbooks are provided free of charge. All innovative programmes and projects initiated in primary school are extended in the *gymnasio*, while an e-twinning programme of schools across Europe is also in force as to 2005.

Table 2 provides the standard timetable for lower secondary education in terms of teaching periods per subject in all three grades. All subjects are compulsory for all pupils. Subjects are taught by specialist teachers, who tend to put greater emphasis to the subject matter rather to the method of instruction. Despite directives to the contrary, instruction is more or less based on chalk and talk teaching. To strengthen the education of pupils and to prevent drop outs and inequalities, provision for remedial teaching is made for pupils facing learning difficulties; participation of pupils in remedial courses is optional. Students are regularly assessed on the basis of a) their overall performance in tests of various types, b) their participation in the teaching-learning process, and c) finals-end of the year written examinations in each course. For pupils to be promoted or graduate they should have an annual general mark of at least 10 (max. 20) in all subjects, but they are allowed to pass even if they fail in a maximum of four subjects, but gain an overall 13 in all subjects (subjects like Physical Education, Music, Art and Home Economics do not count). In case of failure pupils are allowed to sit for a written and oral examination in September in as many subjects as they have failed.

### **The curriculum of the general upper secondary school**

Table 3 provides the standard timetable for general upper secondary school in terms of teaching periods per subject in all three grades. At this level electives are introduced. The pupil is obliged to select one elective at the first grade, two in the second and one in the third. It is clear that through this arrangement the designer of the *lykeio* curriculum has made an attempt to remain loyal to the tradition of encyclopedism, while paying service to the needs of specialization, as the lykeion is for the majority of its graduates the ante chamber for higher education. It is exactly because lykeion is taken by pupils and their parents to constitute a preparatory school for the highly competitive university examination that its independent educative role is undermined in practice. Pupils put all their efforts to the study of subjects that count for university entrance examinations, and choose to abstain from school in order to follow private cramming courses outside it. For pupils to graduate an average 9,5 (out of max. 20) mark is required. This mark is calculated on the basis of the mark for subjects requiring written examinations held both nationwide and at school level.

The structure of evening *lykeio* curriculum differs in some respects from that of the day general *lykeio*. The curriculum of Vocational *lykeion* comprises subjects of general education, of theoretical vocational education and of specialist vocational education.

### **Teachers**

Teachers are all university graduates. Primary school teachers are trained in the Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education functioning in all Greek Universities. Since universities are totally self-governed institutions, teachers are not all exposed to exactly the same training. More or less their studies comprise courses in a) pedagogy, didactics, psychology and social science, b) special subjects (language, mathematics, physical science, humanities, etc) and c) practicals (students attend and then participate in actual teaching practices. Secondary school teachers are university graduates of different Departments depending on their field of specialism. They are trained to be mainly “scientists” and hence their pedagogical training is the exception rather than the rule in their courses. The old belief that “he who knows the subject matter can also teach it properly” still holds true for secondary education.

All teachers are civil employees, enjoying permanent tenure after two years of service and since 1997 entry to the profession is mainly based on their success in the nationwide examination held by the Supreme Employee Selection Board. A teacher is appointed in a school and later transferred from one school to the other across the country upon the decision of the state officials based on a detailed formula (it takes seniority, social parameters etc. into account). Newly appointed teachers are exposed to a short course of introductory in-service training and later on they may attend, if so they wish, other in-service training courses organized by various educational organizations. A limited number of primary school teachers every year may also attend a two year training course at institutions attached to University Departments of Primary Education. During their training they take a sabbatical and are fully salaried.

Generally speaking teachers enjoy social respect which mainly reflects public appreciation of the educational process. The fact that they have not, since 1981, formally evaluated has repeatedly attracted criticism, while secondary school teachers (especially at the upper secondary level) have been frequently criticized for paying more attention to their work as cramming course providers rather than as educators.

### **Financing education**

Education at all levels is provided free. Thus, all costs are covered by the state through the regular budget and the public investments budget of the Ministry of Education. The former covers teachers' salaries, operational costs of school units, books, pupil transportation, scholarships and purchase of teaching equipment. The latter covers fixed asset expenditure (e.g. purchase of land, construction-repair-maintenance of school buildings, laboratory equipment, etc.) as well as scientific research and educational innovation. Part of the Public Investment Programme is financed over the last years by EU funds.

Yet, private expenditure for education in Greece, to the detriment of family budgets, is high. Private expenditure covers the field of educational services provided by private schools as well as the services provided to state schools' pupils by *frontisteria* (private tutorial centres) and by other private tutors (supplementary educators employed by families). Cramming courses provide support teaching to improve the performance of pupils in school subjects, to enhance the learning of a foreign language, or music etc. and to coach university candidates in order to improve their chances in passing the highly competitive entrance examination.

### **Current issues and ongoing debates**

The reform agenda in Greek education has always been lengthy and of a rather unswerving constitution. This certainly reflects, to a large extent, the confrontational political culture in the country, the paralyzing inertia of central bureaucracy and the irresolute behaviour of political actors when it comes to changing things. Thus the agenda includes long standing issues together with temporary ones. Some of them constitute hot public issues; others are less publicized.

Among the oldest and yet still among the most prevalent is the all embracing issue of funding education. Students, teachers and education circles of today, like their counterparts in the massive demonstrations of the early 1960s, are still demanding the increase of public educational expenditure to 5% of the GNP (II). Political parties of the opposition always make promises only to forget them when they assume office. Consequently, educational expenditure in Greece continues to be among the lowest in the OECD countries, thus hindering change and at the same time diverting public attention from other equally important issues, since the demand for increasing the educational budget prevails in the political discourse. Had it not been for EU

subsidizing the public investments budget, the situation would have become explosive.

The second among long-standing problems concerns the quest for the decentralization of the educational system. It is true that over the last 20 years, following the restructuring of public administration, measures have been taken to devolve authority at the regional and local levels. Yet, this devolution of power concerns mainly managerial aspects of education, like the construction and maintenance of school buildings, the implementation of several educational projects and programmes, the support of various cultural activities, etc. All important decisions concerning educational objectives, curriculum, textbooks, initial and in-service training of teachers etc. still remain, as it has been earlier explained, in the hands of the Minister. Several prefects and majors as well as the teacher unions have been complaining for this state of affairs on various occasions (II). Yet, even these criticisms have been addressing the issue of decentralization in terms of asserting for themselves an increased executive role in the management of administrative aspects of education and not so much in terms of claiming responsibility for purely educational matters. To the reasons already referred to earlier, one should add two more that are especially relevant for understanding why the issue of school autonomy has never been actually raised. The first is the consequence of the time long tradition which considers the school to be primarily the cradle of the intellectual development of the child and of the formation of his/her national identity. This overarching task underplays the role of school as an active force in the local community and consequently it does not contribute to the legitimation of the school as an independent social actor that deserves increased autonomy. The second reason is more ideological in character. For many among the educational (and the party political) establishment, school autonomy rings the bell of recent reforms in England (and other mainly anglosaxon countries) concerning especially the Local Management of Schools provision. School autonomy, to their deep concern, may imply or lead to the neo-liberal policies of deregulation, competition among schools, parental involvement, fund raising practices, etc.; policies that are being considered unacceptable on ideological grounds and ineffective in practical terms (II).

The majority of the remaining contemporary issues have been raised rather recently over the last two or three decades and can be distinguished by level of education. The more pressing and heated issues refer to higher education. The



establishment of private universities is among the more outstanding and strongly debated issues nowadays. Those supporting this policy argue (Bitros, 2005; Fountoukakos, 2005; Travlos, 2005; Psacharopoulos, 2003; Embeoglou, 2007) – the governing party and several liberal organizations, groups and individuals – argue that this would improve through competition the performance and the academic quality of public universities; it will relieve the state budget from its excessive operational burden thus increasing the quality returns of the investment; it will enhance the choice of courses among candidates and the flexibility of the system as a whole; it will minimize competition for access to higher education and consequently the private expenditure for *frontisteria* and for studies abroad, which is among the highest in the world (it is estimated that more than ... undergraduate young people study abroad). Those opposing the policy (Babiniotis, 2005; Koumantos, 2005; Stathopoulos, 2007) call upon article 16 of the Constitution, which orders that higher education is the exclusive responsibility of the state; they reject the idea of commercializing education; they refer to the university tradition of independent thinking that would be undermined by the involvement of market forces; they wonder whether private enterprises would be ready to invest and not merely to exploit the dreams and expectations of youngsters for a better life. Confrontation on this issue has repeatedly over the last years led to head-on collisions between demonstrating militants and the police.

The issue of private universities is closely linked with the grievances of the public university – and there are many. Shortage of funding has already been mentioned. This is further aggravated by the fact that consecutive governments have proceeded, mainly in order to pamper their constituents, to the development of new universities, new university departments and ATEI all over the country, without at the same time increasing the overall budget for higher education (II). University authorities constantly complain that the lack of resources together with the curtailed university autonomy undermine the quality of their work (II).

The wider public witnesses an endless controversy between the government, university authorities and militant students – usually supported by political parties of the Left – and takes sides under the influence of mass media which tend to focus on the stimulating rather than on the fundamental dimensions of the problem. The issues that capture public attention include the “life student” (the student that had once been enrolled and, although he/she has never finished his course of studies, he/she remains

enrolled); the “flying professors” – professors living in one city and working in another, thus having to commute every week by plane, boat or car; the party political shady transaction between academics who aspire to gain office and students who can deliver a substantial number of votes; the disruption of meetings of the senate or even the occasional bullying of professors by militant student groups; the occupation of university buildings and the destruction of scientific equipment by “unknown” persons etc. (The university building is considered as a kind of sanctuary and the police will not enter it unless university authorities invite them to.) These are certainly some of the problems – perhaps the symptoms of social and institutional immobilism when it comes to reform – that higher education is faced with. The present government attempted to resolve some of them by passing a new law which was faced with the strong reaction of a part of the academic community and of the Left wing parties. Despite that, the law has passed through the Parliament but some of its provisions have not yet been implemented; it is not always easy for university authorities to enforce the law, faced as they are on the one hand with their willingness to resolve all problems within the bosom of the academia and on the other with the violent behaviour of militants.

Finally, the evaluation of higher education institutions has become over the last few years yet another issue for confrontation. In 2005 the government established a system of internal and external evaluation arguing that this would bring the country in line with the Bologna process, and would at the same time increase institutional accountability. University authorities on their part, although open in principle to evaluation, asserted that prior to evaluation was the proper funding of higher education by the government. Yet the Left, both inside and outside the university, opposed evaluation on ideological, political and academic grounds. The Bologna process was, to their way of thinking, nothing more than yet another attempt on the part of the European Union directorate and of its business patrons to bring higher education in line with their economic interests; a development that would violate the sacred traditions of academic freedom and autonomy by the market and that would undermine not only the intellectual but also the social role of the university (Xanthopoulos, 2001; Mattheou, 2004; Mattheou, 2006). The new system was for them the watch dog of the evaluative state, one of those creatures of neo-liberal obsession, whose underhand influence had already been tested in the anglosaxon world. Due to strong opposition the new law still awaits its implementation.

Pre-tertiary education too has been over the last few years the site of many debates. The evaluation of education, which to the government's perception seems to coincide with the evaluation of teachers, is one of them. Arguing that evaluation would be used as a means to elicit teacher compliance and to impose uniformity in the system (II), teacher unions have managed thus far to prevent the implementation of the law. Lack of systematic, recurrent and long in-service training, especially in the case of secondary school teachers who lack pedagogical training, has also on several occasions attracted public attention. Teachers, parents and several educationists are also raising issues concerning the curriculum and the textbooks, the operation of the all-day schools, the prevailing overall teaching and learning climate in schools and so on. Despite recent reforms in the curriculum and textbooks, complaints and arguments are not rare. Among the most recent debates in this context two are outstanding: the first refers to the teaching of religion in schools and the second to history textbooks. As already mentioned religious instruction has been compulsory to all schools. Yet, the increasingly multicultural composition of the school classes has come to add its weight to the arguments of those sections of society that have always supported a secular curriculum (II). To the discontent of the Church (II) the government decided in 2008 that all parents – and not only those of a different religious persuasion – would be allowed to withdraw their children from religious instruction. The occasion for the debate on history textbooks was given by the publication in 2006 of a new history textbook for the fifth grade of the primary school. This textbook was criticized for presenting modern Greek history on a sectarian, unilateral and arbitrary manner that not only distorted historical facts but also run contrary to the living memories of a large number of the population(II). Despite support the book received from a number of historians (II) the government finally withdrew it under public pressure. Yet, of a more permanent character when it comes to textbooks is the issue of the existence at all levels of education only one textbook per subject. Several proposals have been made for the introduction of two to three alternative textbooks from which the school should decide (II). Yet no such decision has been thus far made. Finally, the school has been repeatedly criticized for being a tiresome, tiring and on occasions hazardous place from which action, youthfulness and joy have been expelled (II). Factors held usually responsible for this state of affairs are many. The first is closely related to parental aspirations to offer their children supplementary and sound education in foreign languages, music, art, sports etc., so that they would be better prepared for

adult life. In seeking these extra curricular activities from institutions outside the school, they undervalue the significance of school education in the eyes of their children. At the same time by over-burdening them with excessive and demanding tasks in their free time, they undermine their willingness and their readiness to participate actively in school activities and enjoy school life. The second is related to the barren, theoretical and wordy structure of the school curriculum as well as to the obsolete teaching methods that favour rote learning and marginalize critical thinking. Finally, a third important factor relates to the precarious prospects of employment education provides in the competitive and uncertain contemporary world. Convinced that the school is no more the ladder of social mobility as in the past, pupils come to school disenchanted and uninterested for what the school has to offer, sometimes demonstrating an unprovoked aggressive behaviour.

A catalyst to this adverse climate is the system of access to higher education; an issue that continues to preoccupy the wider public, to agitate parents and children and to upset the educational process in schools, especially at the upper secondary level (Mattheou, 2008; Mattheou, 2005; Xohellis, 2008; Gotovos, 2008; Kassotakis, 2005; Babiniotis, 2005). It has already been explained that education, general education in particular, has been traditionally seen as a ladder of socio-economic mobility. Hence, especially after the massification of secondary education, the great majority of families would like to see their offsprings to get into higher education, preferably universities. Demand for it is therefore high. Moreover, demand is not equally distributed: there are popular and less popular Schools. Consequently, excessive demand on the one hand and the *numerous clausius* on the other, lead candidates to *frontisteria*, thus by-passing school instruction and undermining its educative role. Several policies have been implemented in the past three decades and various proposals have been made to resolve the problem which seems to be resistant. The present minister of education has called for a yet another public consultation that would expectedly lead in the final resolution of the problem. As he has stated, this would be part of a broader strategy aiming to promote systematic consultation in education-related matters at a national level and to develop a national debate on the proposals coming from all interest groups and stakeholders. Yet the auspices are not favourable. Political culture remains polarized and confrontational. Debate is actually a series of parallel monologues; occasionally instances of vociferating deafs.

## **Coda**

Once more, the study of Greek education provides evidence as to the truthfulness of the Sadlerian verdict that the “national system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties and of battles long ago”. It is clear that the centralized system of educational administration, the encyclopaedic, theoretical, humanistic and literary character of the curriculum, the conviction that education has a socially equalizing and individually liberating potential are all reminiscent of the historical development of the country. And at the same time it is also true for the prevailing confrontational political culture, the weak civic society and the inefficient – and on occasion unwilling – state officials and politicians to enforce the law they themselves had formulated and enacted. It is also clear that all these long-standing traditions may provide some explanation why education in Greece is only gradually and grudgingly changing; why the reform agenda differs in its composition from those in other European countries, despite the merging of educational contexts in an increasingly globalized world.

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