

Continuing education

(about the need to adopt our school system to respond to changing social needs)

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm sure you have heard the term "continuing education", or life-long learning, as it is also called. It has become a very fashionable issue lately. For a while, our Ministry of Education was even renamed the Ministry of Education and Life-Long Learning.

Actually, "continuing education" is not really the right term for this process, because it is not really a continuation. Often, it is a starting over: training for an entirely different job or specialty. At other times, it can be a catching-up: bringing yourself up-to-date on the latest developments in your field. In other words, there is more to continuing education than simply continuing. This rather innocent-sounding term hides some profound changes in the modern labour market, changes that are gradually affecting the whole structure of education.

To put very simply, the problem is that the modern economy is changing so fast that educational systems cannot keep up with it. New kinds of knowledge are being created at an incredible speed. But educational systems are slow and ponderous institutions. By the time a government realizes that a new kind of job or profession has appeared, and by the time it manages to create a special course or training programme to produce people trained for this job, it may be too late: the jobs have gone somewhere else, and the country's economy has fallen behind.

Essentially, what I am saying is that it is simply impossible to foresee what will be the needs of the job market ten years from now, and for that reason it is impossible to plan an educational system that will provide for those needs.

It makes more sense to educate people in such a way that they will be able to respond flexibly to new needs, by acquiring new training or more training when they need it.

But if we are to do that, we need to think seriously about the kind of education that we are already providing. Not the continuing education, but the basic one. Because this kind of open-ended education depends on a school system with a different approach to learning. We do not need students who have learned how to memorize textbooks. We need students who know how to find new information, and how to evaluate that information. We need students who have fact-finding skills and critical thinking.

And that is why - in my opinion - the need for continuing education is going to affect not only what people do **after** they finish school, but even more profoundly what they do while they are **in** school.

Thank you.

(426 words)