Executive Summary

This report begins with a brief overview of the legal and institutional context for access to information and public consultation in the Czech Republic. Traditional means of providing public information originating from government (such as newsletters or radio broadcasts) and feedback by citizens (such as letters and petitions) have recently been strengthened by the first appointment to the post of Ombudsman in December 2000. The report charts the growing use of websites and portals by the public administration at the national, regional and local levels to provide information to citizens – but notes that the use of the Internet for on-line consultation remains rare.

The case study itself focuses on a recent public information and consultation exercise called “A Challenge for 10 Million” conducted during the preparation of the Government White Book on Education Policy in 1999 to 2000. Information on the policy proposal and opportunities for public consultation was provided via a special bulletin, press conferences for the media and a dedicated website. A series of public discussion sessions and roundtables were organised throughout the country by schools and educational establishments. Important roles in assisting the Ministry of Education in the organisation of this extensive information and consultation programme were played by an independent public institution operating in the field of education and by a prominent non-governmental organisation.

The case study offers an evaluation of the public information and consultation campaign based on independent reports and additional interviews with key participants. It finds that the public participation exercise was largely focused on education professionals (such as principals and teachers) and that less attention was paid to providing information to, or soliciting the views of, the general public (including parents and students). Finally, it recognises that these initial efforts to introduce broad-based public consultation in national policy-making represent an important cultural shift and positive contribution to strengthening government-citizen relations in the Czech Republic.

The report concludes with a number of concrete policy lessons based on the Czech Republic’s initial experience of engaging citizens in policy-making, including the need to:

- Provide full public information on the policy issue under discussion, the consultation schedule and official contact points.
- Raise the capacity of the public administration to plan, manage and evaluate public information and consultation exercises.
- Overcome citizens’ diffidence towards the public administration through concerted and repeated efforts to engage them in consultation.
- Build trust in the process by providing feedback on contributions made to the discussion.

The case study was submitted to the Secretariat in 2001 and covers events up to that date.
Introduction

The first part of the report provides a brief overview of the legal and institutional context in which communication between government and citizens takes place in the Czech Republic. Special attention is paid to how the government makes use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in providing information to the public.

The second part of the report is a case study. It reviews experience in conducting public consultation in 1999 and 2000 during the preparation of the government's White Book on Education Policy. It traces four stages of the public consultation exercise and identifies the impact of each stage on the subsequent one, both in terms of the documents produced and the methods used in guiding the discussion. Most attention is devoted to the second stage, for which a detailed project proposal was prepared – including a plan for its realisation and the evaluation of its results. The case study concludes with a summary of the obstacles to and benefits of public consultation as identified by participants, and identifies a number of conditions for holding successful public consultation for policy-making.

The case study required the collection of a number of documents from various institutions, whose analysis provided an overall picture of the public consultation. The project proposal for “Stage Two” and the related evaluation documents were among the primary sources of information. Relevant websites and periodicals publicising information on the public discussion were monitored, and this work was complemented by 11 structured interviews with those directly involved in the process – drawn from among both the organisers and the participants. Finally, participation in the National Seminar held in November 2000 allowed for the first-hand observation of one form of discussion used in the process.

Background of the Czech Political System

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary republic and a unitary state. Under the 1993 Constitution, state power is exercised by the legislative, executive and judicial branches respectively. The Parliament has two chambers: the Lower House (Chamber of Deputies) and the Upper House (the Senate). The President is elected by both houses of Parliament for five-year terms, and has restricted and mostly representative responsibilities. The President appoints the Prime Minister, members of the government, ambassadors, and the chief of staff of the military, and signs laws. The President may return laws to the Lower House, but a presidential veto can be overridden by an absolute majority of all members of the Lower House.

The Lower House has the power to pass laws by a simple majority of members present during any given session, to cast a vote of no confidence vote against the government, and to override the vetoes of the President and the Upper House. The Lower House has 200 members, elected for four-year terms under a proportional electoral system. The Upper House has limited legislative power, and is only authorised to act upon legislation from the Lower House. Its 81 members are voted in for six-year terms through a majority electoral system. Elections are held every two years to replace one-third of the members, thereby rotating membership.

The Czech Republic is divided into municipalities that are the basic territorial units of self-government and administration. There are 6 232 urban and rural municipalities. The 1990 Act on Municipalities distinguishes between two types of municipal competences: “competences of self-government” where the municipality is bound to fulfil public duties specified in acts and legal regulations, and “transferred competences” consisting of those functions delegated by the state administration to the municipality. Citizens elect the Municipal Council once every four years, which in turn elects the Mayor and the Municipal Board to exercise executive power in the municipality.

The regions represent a higher level of local government. Since 1997, the country has been divided into 13 regions plus the capital city of Prague. The Act on Regions (No. 129/2000) defines two types of regional competence in a manner similar to that of the Act on Municipalities: the region has duties of self-government and is also responsible for the state administration of the territory. The Council of the Region is elected for a four-year term and, in turn, elects the head of the region (Hejtman) as well as the Board to serve as the executive branch of the region. The first regional elections were held in 2000.
Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic, has a unique position within the Czech system of local government, which is defined by a special law (most recently amended by law No. 132/2000).

The District Office is a body of state administration only. It fulfils its functions on the level between the municipality and the region, on the territory of the district. There are 77 districts in the Czech Republic. This administrative unit is to be abolished under the framework of the public administration reform programme.

**Legal and Institutional Framework for Public Participation**

The basic preconditions for public participation are assured by the 1993 Constitution, which characterises the Czech Republic as a sovereign, unitary, and democratic state based on the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms. These constitutional rights have been given greater definition in a series of laws having an impact on public participation (e.g. on access to information). In practice, the first half of the 1990s did not witness many significant government efforts to engage in consultation with the public. Recent public discussions, such as that on the public administration reform programme and the Government White Book on Education Policy (which is the focus of this case study), however, demonstrates the increased attention paid by the government to this issue.

**Legal framework**

The following are among the principal laws defining rights to information, consultation and public participation in the Czech Republic:

- **Law on free access to information** (No. 106/1999 Sb.): this law came into effect on 1 January 2000 and establishes the obligation of public administration and its territorial agencies to provide the public with information (except information defined as secret under special law) as well as the conditions of this service. Administrative offices are obliged to make information available in a place generally open to the public and to respond to citizens’ requests within clearly defined conditions (e.g. time limits and costs).

- **Law on the protection of personal data** (No. 101/2000 Sb.): regulates the protection of personal data of physical persons and establishes the rights and responsibility for processing such data.

- **Administrative Procedures Code** (No. 71/1967 Sb.): dates from 1967, was most recently amended in 2000 (No. 29/2000 Sb. and No. 227/2000 Sb.). A new Code is currently being prepared and is expected to be approved by Parliament by the end of 2001.

- **Law on the Ombudsman** (No. 349/1999 Sb.): under which the Ombudsman is charged with protecting individuals from actions of administration and other institutions, insofar as these are inconsistent with law and democratic principles. The first Ombudsman of the Czech Republic was elected by the parliament on 12 December 2000 (see: www.ochrance.cz).

- **Law on Environment Impact Assessment** (No. 244/1992, amended by No. 132/2000): establishes the right of interested members of the public and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to participate in the process of conducting Environment Impact Assessments.

- **Law on the right to information on the environment** (No. 125/1998): sets out the duty of public administration and local government to inform the public on the state of environment and natural resources in a timely and complete manner.

A number of policy initiatives, including a “State information policy document” adopted in 1999 (with Government Resolution No. 525/1999), have also been taken; they complement this legal framework.

**Institutional framework**

The application of this set of legislative provisions is ensured by a number of institutional mechanisms to provide information, opportunities for feedback and active participation:
Information

When providing the public with important information, the public administration (central and local government) makes primary use of its administrative buildings, periodicals, and occasional publications such as news reports and bulletins. Radio and television are also used in a number of towns and regions. To a growing degree, state administrations (ministries, district offices), as well as regions and municipalities, are developing their own Internet websites, which facilitate rapid information provision and interaction. Several websites now offer the possibility for citizens to access information from all public administration agencies as well as the local government offices of municipalities and regions (including www.statnisprava.cz and www.centralni-adresa.cz – the latter is called “Central Address” and offers access to all the information services of various parts of the public administration in a single portal).

Feedback and consultation

Opinion surveys carried out among citizens on behalf of the public administration represent the main form of feedback on public affairs. Public consultations through public hearings, interviews with deputies, roundtables, and other forms of face-to-face discussion are a relatively new practice in the Czech Republic. The most frequent initiators and organisers of such events are non-governmental organisations (NGOs), often aimed at community or environmental activities. Co-operation between NGOs and regional administration in organising, for example, public hearings on issues affecting a given town or region is not unknown. Another form of feedback may also be found in the formal complaints submitted by citizens to the local mayor, the municipal office, the ministries and the president. The newly established Ombudsman office, based in Brno, will provide citizens with an additional means of lodging complaints and seeking redress.

E-mail messages and on-line discussion forums provide a new way for government to receive citizens' opinions and comments. This type of on-line discussion forum was launched by the Ministry of the Interior at the beginning of 1998, when it was preparing a public administration reform programme. At the beginning of 2000, when the package of laws on local government was passed by parliament, the web pages on which the forum was hosted underwent restructuring, following which it will be relaunched.

Active participation

One form of active participation by citizens in policy-making is represented by membership in the various commissions, committees and advisory bodies established by both local and central administrations – although membership in such bodies is usually reserved for experts. The Czech Government has approximately 30 such commissions and committees, while the ministries, local and regional governments also have their own initiatives and advisory bodies.

Local referenda and petitions represent another traditional form of active participation available to all citizens. Other innovative methods that bring citizens into direct contact with the decision-making process, such as consultation forums with specific groups in society, scenario workshops, youth and child councils, are only rarely adopted by the public administration.

An important role in promoting more frequent use of citizen engagement in decision-making is played by foreign NGOs and institutions (e.g. Agora, EastWest Institute, and the Open Society Fund). These actors often contribute know-how, personnel and financial support to specific projects to promote the active participation of citizens, which also involve local governments and NGOs.

Use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs)

The 1999 Law on Free Access to Information states that all information which government offices are obliged to make publicly available as a standard service must, as of 2001, be fully accessible not only in physical locations but also through the Internet.
According to a recent report, by 1999 all of the ministries had developed their own websites on the Internet which provided information on: legislation in designated spheres, policy documents, up-to-date information on programmes, grants, funds, and the integration of the Czech Republic into the European Union, as well as general materials mapping out the state of society in fields covered by the relevant departments (Czerná and Jungová, 1999, pp. 28-29). By the end of 2000, all the ministries’ websites offered e-mail, two-thirds used hypertext references and over half included useful search engines and information services for citizens (e.g. on job opportunities through the Employment Office). This may be considered as a positive indication of an increasing openness of ministries and an ability to communicate with citizens. At the same time, even on the level of ministries, on-line discussion forums are a rare occurrence.

The websites of the territorial bodies of public administration, such as district offices and municipalities have also developed rapidly. In March 1999, 37 per cent of the district Offices had still not developed their own website, and 27 per cent used the server of the state administration. By November 1999, 84 per cent of the district offices were already running their own websites (Czerná, Maresová and Chum, 1999, pp. 28-30).

Today, all district offices have their own websites. While some are extremely simple, underdeveloped, and more reminiscent of a telephone directory (offering only telephone numbers, postal and e-mail addresses) others are well prepared and user-friendly, with a number of interactive windows, references to sources on laws, applications, tourist information, and even information on institutions abroad. They also include detailed lists of statements from the district office and information on email addresses of employees to facilitate direct contact by citizens.

At present, the information content of district offices' websites is set to some degree by the Law on Free Access to Information, in effect since January 2000 (e.g. on service fees, the opportunity for e-mail contact) but also offer information on other matters deemed suitable (Czerná, 2000, pp. 24-25). However, the information flow between citizens and the state administration remains, for the time being, largely one-sided. Citizens now receive more information, but its selection is determined by the public administration. In the case of smaller communities, the situation depends on the skills and enthusiasm of local citizens, especially young people, thanks to whom a number of smaller communities have developed very good websites (Czerná and Jungová, 2000, pp. 26-27).

A rapid glance at the above-mentioned websites today confirms many of the same insufficiencies observed in 1999, namely lack of information on when the site was last updated, old information, and no information on current issues.

**Overview of the Case Study**

In April 1999, the Government of the Czech Republic adopted the “Concept for Education and for the Development of Education Policy in the Czech Republic” prepared by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereafter Ministry of Education). At the same time, the government set the Ministry of Education the task of initiating a public discussion whose results would be used for working out a strategic document on education policy (entitled “The National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic”) by the end of 2000. This document was later renamed “The White Book”, and was developed in an interactive manner with public consultation under a programme entitled “A Challenge for 10 Million”.

From the viewpoint of the Minister of Education, the purpose of the White Book was to determine the overall framework for national education policy, its long-term goals and their order of importance, to propose concrete measures for achieving these goals, and to set out decisive steps for bringing them about.

The Ministry of Education prepared and launched a nationwide public discussion of the White Book in four main stages (see Table 14 below).
Table 14. **Timetable for preparing the Government's White Book on Education Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>May to October 1999</td>
<td>“Concept for Education and for the Development of Education Policy in the Czech Republic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>October 1999 to February 2000</td>
<td>Seven background studies on specific areas of education policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>February to June 2000</td>
<td>Thematic projects and key points of the National Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>June to December 2000</td>
<td>Draft versions of the White Book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage One: preparing a new education policy**

On 13 May 1999, the Ministry of Education made available to the public through the Ministry's website the 'Concept for Education and for the Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic', which had been prepared by a team of experts in the Ministry (see: www.msmt.cz). In the preface, the Minister of Education appealed to the public to participate in the discussion of the document. On 25 May 1999 the Concept was published in the periodical “Teacher's News” (Učitelské noviny) along with the Minister's appeal, which was of a general nature and did not specify the concrete measures by which to participate.

Twenty contributions to the discussion of this first, general document were published on the discussion web page: individuals submitted six, and the rest came from various institutions and associations (six pedagogical associations, three elementary and secondary schools, three faculties of education, and two unions). The length of the comments in each contribution runs from between two to nine pages, and the majority were submitted between May and October 1999.

The first stage concluded with the approval of a detailed project proposal for the second phase entitled, ‘Stage Two in the Preparation of the National Programme for the Development of Education and the Related Public Discussion and Information Campaign’. The Institute for Information on Education (Ústav pro informace ve vzdebnání - or UIV) (see: www.uiv.cz) drew up this document on behalf of the Ministry of Education, under whose authority and budget the Institute falls. The proposed programme of activities was to run to the end of 2000 with a budget of 2 million CZK (57 890 Euro). This initiative also received support from the Education Support Project of the Open Society Fund Prague (OSF), part of an international non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the development of an open society in Central and Eastern Europe and worldwide (see: www.osf.cz). In this way, a non-governmental organisation became a working partner of the Ministry of Education – contributing both to the project team and to covering 50 per cent of the planned expenses.

The main management structures of the project included:

- **Council for Education Policy** – the Minister's advisory body, composed of two representatives from the Ministry, two independent experts, and thirteen representatives from other institutions and organisations (parliament, unions, employers, professional associations).

- **Executive Council** – the main management body for the project, headed by the first deputy minister and including in its membership heads of other organisations participating in the project, a media employee from the Ministry, and a representative from the Open Society Fund.

- **Basic Team** – led by Ministry of Education with representatives of institutions dealing with education issues (Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSV), Research Institute of Professional Education (VUOS), Centre for Education Policy (SVP) and the “Teachers' News” newsletter (UN)]. This team was responsible for the preparation of documents for public consultation and for their revision following evaluation of the public discussion. The team also coordinated the working teams responsible for the seven background studies.

A project team led by the director of the Institute for Information on Education (UIV) was responsible for managing and organising the public consultation and information campaign.
Stage Two: conducting public consultation

On 26 October 1999 the Ministry of Education held a presentation in Prague in which it declared its intention to launch a society-wide discussion in preparation of the White Book on Education Policy. The detailed plan and suggested topics for public discussion were also made public on the same day through the Internet and in the weekly periodicals “Teachers’ News” and “Public Administration” (Verejna sprava – or VS).

A set of seven background studies, each dealing with a specific topic (e.g. pre-school education, higher education), had been developed on the basis of comments received in the first stage. These were published over the period November 1999 to January 2000 and served as the basic documents for the subsequent public information campaign and consultation exercise.

An Office of Public Discussion was set up at the Institute for Information on Education (UIV), in order to collect all the responses and comments submitted by fax, post and email, to conduct an initial evaluation of the comments and to forward them to the individual working teams working on specific topics. The Office of Public Discussion also organised a series of roundtable discussions in Prague – the topics for which were selected in accordance with discussion themes proposed by the Minister, and so as to be of interest to the general public, journalists, and education professionals. The Office also maintained the “Challenge for 10 Million” website and provided professionals and the general public with information on the course of events through the web and a special bulletin (see below). During the autumn of 1999 and the first few months of 2000, school administrations, pedagogical associations and others organised discussion meetings throughout the country.

The main vehicles used in the public information campaign and consultations may be summarised as follows:

- Special bulletin for education professionals (“A Challenge for 10 Million”): this was issued as a supplement to two periodicals “Teachers’ News” and “Public Administration”, and distributed directly to public administration and education establishments as well as the media. Each 8-page bulletin included a summary of one of the seven background studies, a commentary, opinions and comments from the public, a debate between two professionals on a given topic and information related to forthcoming roundtables and seminars. A total of seven issues of the bulletin were published with 45,000 copies of each issue. It is estimated that 90 per cent of top management in the field of education, and four out of five teachers, read the Bulletin. A lesser impact was had among other key groups such as public administration officials, unions, communities, and employers.

- The media played a prominent role in disseminating information about the “Challenge for 10 Million” and were provided with information through distribution of the Bulletin and a total of seven press conferences. The transcripts from some of the discussion campaigns and from all of the six roundtable discussions also were made public. From the Open Society Fund’s evaluation report and documents supplied by the Institute for Information on Education (UIV), it appears that most of the information presented by the media appeared in print format, particularly in the national and regional daily newspapers. According to OSF, national newspapers took up 49 per cent of the share in informing the public, regional newspapers 35 per cent, periodicals and weeklies 10 per cent, and radio and television 6 per cent. The most information on the topic was provided by the national daily newspaper Mladá fronta Dnes. According to the UIV’s analysis, the intensity of media coverage grew gradually from October 1999 when the public consultation was officially launched and peaked at the beginning of 2000 (Friedman and Vrzáček, 2000). In total, 440 articles on the topic were published, of which 235 were printed in national daily newspapers and weeklies, and almost 200 in regional and local newspapers. Radio stations with nationwide broadcast capacity addressed the topic within 34 programmes, while television covered it in 23 programmes.

- The Internet was also used to disseminate key documents, starting with the original “Concept” posted on the website of the Ministry of Education in May 1999. It also offered a means for on-line
public discussion through a website created for the “Challenge for 10 Million” (see: www.10milionu.cz). This site contains an introduction by the Minister of Education; information on how the public consultation was organised and how to contribute; full texts of the seven background studies; comments submitted on-line during the first and second stages of the public consultation; transcripts from the roundtable discussions; up-to-date information on events and contact details for further information. Links to this website featured on the home pages of school administrations in several districts as well as on those of the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Information on Education (UIV). According to the latter, between November 1999 and February 2000, the “Challenge for 10 Million” public discussion website was accessed 231 013 times, and 11 203 unique visitors were recorded. It is estimated that roughly 15-20 per cent of participants in the discussion used the Internet (see Box 42 for selected comments). This figure reflects the fact that access to Internet is not yet widespread in the Czech Republic – indeed only one-third of the elementary schools are linked to the Internet while in secondary education the situation is better, with Internet used in 80 per cent of schools.

Public discussion events and roundtables played an important role as channels for information and consultation, and were organised throughout the country by school administrations and education institutions as well as the Ministry of Education. During the period from December 1999 to February 2000, the Institute for Information on Education (UIV) organised a total of six roundtable discussions in Prague with the participation of education specialists, media representatives, education professionals and the general public. Throughout the entire Czech Republic, discussion forums were organised on various topics related to the reform of the education system. The Ministry of Education reports that during the second stage of the discussion, over 100 public discussions were organised by research institutes, school administrations, associations, and pedagogical interest organisations, with a total of 6 000 participants. According to the OSF’s evaluation report, between 25 October 1999 and 18 February 2000, a total of 46 organisations arranged 71 public discussions in which 2 904 individuals participated.

The primary target group of the public consultation exercise consisted of teachers and education professionals - and this group was also the best informed. The participation of social partners (e.g. chambers of commerce, employment agencies) in the discussion was markedly weaker. Originally, the project planned to distribute information brochures and leaflets in order to reach a wider public outside the field of education professionals – including parents and students. However, this did not materialise and the Internet remained the main instrument oriented toward the public at large – both professional and lay. However, given that levels of Internet access among the general public remain low, this has meant a limited impact.

The public had several possibilities for presenting their opinions and comments on the available policy documents, all of which were used: traditional means of communication, in the form of faxes and letters (e.g. a total of 181 written responses were addressed directly to the Office of Public Discussion of the UIV); e-mails to the website, to the Office and to individual team members; and direct contact during the roundtable discussions and other events held throughout the country.

**Stages Three and Four: Drafting and discussion at the National Seminar**

Upon conclusion of the second stage in February 2000, the Ministry of Education decided to take over the organisation of the project itself. The character of the preparatory process for the White Book also changed as the Ministry substantially withdrew from broad public discussion, and directed its attention to consultation with professional circles and drafting of the White Book itself. The dedicated public discussion websites also ceased to operate, whereby the process of informing the public of the course of preparation of the document was substantially circumscribed. Based also on the results from the public consultations conducted in Stage Two a collection of thematic studies was prepared, during which several professional seminars were held (Summer 2000).

The first version of the White Book was completed on 10 September 2000, and submitted to the Council for Education Policy and internal management at the Ministry. Comments from the Ministry were
Box 42. Selected comments submitted by the public to the “Challenge for 10 Million” website

This material (the Concept) may on the whole be positively perceived as a “step forward”:

• “Overall we view the material submitted as being comprehensive and conceptual, capable of pushing Czech education significantly forward...” (Elementary school, Litvínov)
• “We praise the introduction of the Concept and consider it to be a renewal of hope for a substantial and necessary change. ” (NEMES – Independent Interdisciplinary Group)

Nevertheless, the document is criticised for its too general, and at times incomprehensible, character:

• “…The overall impression is destroyed by too many general ideas,...an excessive use of foreign expressions...” (Teacher)
• “The study is too general and not very provocative” (Association of Elementary Education Teachers)

The contributions often contain a positive evaluation of the initiation of public discussion:

• “…It is necessary to highly and positively praise this effort, among other reasons because it is accompanied by a formed public discussion, which is an entirely new situation. Those behind this work are consciously submitting their proposal for public evaluation, which means undertaking a certain amount of risk. ”
• “…We welcome the efforts of the Ministry of Education to work out a long-term strategy, and we consider it to be a proper and democratic step that the issue has been opened for public discussion” (PAU)

Equally, some fears are expressed over the success and results of the planned discussion:

• “This public discussion should not be merely a formal one as in previous cases...the comments should genuinely be taken into account” (ANO – Alliance of Non-governmental Organisations for Childrens' Rights)
• “The guided discussion of the Concept, and the fact that this material is on the government agenda provide hope that the efforts of the creators of the Concept and its commentators will not be wasted as has been the case in previous conceptual phases” (Association of School Managers)

included in the next version of the White Book, which was completed by the end of September. On 24 October 2000, this second version of the White Book was made available on the Ministry's website together with an e-mail address for submitting proposals and comments. In addition, information on two workshops on post-secondary education and regional education as well as a National Seminar planned for November was provided.

The National Seminar

The National Seminar aimed to reach a consensus among the academic and teaching public, employers, unions, state administration bodies, and local administration. It was held on 21 November 2000 at the Ministry of Education, and approximately 120 people participated. At the seminar, it was reported that about 30 comments on the second version of the White Book had been received from individuals and various institutions. Suggestions and comments were also collected during the discussion sessions of the National Seminar. After the seminar, the national daily newspaper Mlada fronta Dnes dedicated 8 pages to information on the White Book.

A third version of the White Book emerged out of this stage of discussion and was posted on the Ministry of Education website on 6 December 2000. According to media reports, the government approved the fourth (and final) version of the White Book on Education Policy on 7 February 2001.
Table 15. **Tools used for public information and consultation in preparing the White Book**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Number of participants (estimated)</th>
<th>Period of time</th>
<th>Number of Encounters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin*</td>
<td>315,000</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>11,203</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>231,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion group</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round tables</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press conference</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Seminar</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimate based on distribution of seven issues of the bulletin at 45,000 copies each.

**Evaluating Public Information and Consultation**

In February 2000, two evaluation reports were prepared on the second stage of the public discussion and the preparation of the White Book. One was a summary report prepared on behalf of the Basic Team and the Open Society Fund (Koucky and Kovarović, 2000) and the other was an internal evaluation by the Open Society Fund team (Friedman and Vrzáček, 2000).

### 5.1. Evaluation reports

Both reports were intended for the Executive Council and both reports made use of largely the same sources. In particular, they referred to the results of seven empirical investigations into the attitudes and opinions of the key actors in the public consultation (members of the public, authors of the studies and organisers of the public discussion events) conducted by SOFRES-FACTUM, a polling agency, under the auspices of the Open Society Fund’s Educational Support Project (PORYV). The difference between the two evaluation reports lies in their scope and in the way in which the polling results were used. From these analyses it was possible to respond to practical questions related to the second stage of the public discussion and the preparation of the White Book. The Ministry of Education has not undertaken its own evaluation of the information campaign and the public consultations conducted under the “Challenge for 10 Million” initiative, nor are there plans to do so.

**Methodology:** The method used in the SOFRES-FACTUM assessment of the consultation procedure was based on a set of empirical surveys:

- **Targeted field research** among the professional (pedagogic) and lay public conducted by means of questionnaires after studying the relevant background studies. The selection of localities and schools corresponded to the regional divisions of the Czech Republic. The research took place during the period 4-18 February 2000. The resulting sample was composed of 171 respondents – of which the professional pedagogic public made up roughly 60 per cent and the lay public 40 per cent of total respondents. Respondents were selected proportionally according to the types of schools (15 per cent nursery schools, 45 per cent elementary schools, 10 per cent secondary grammar schools, 10 per cent secondary technical schools, 10 per cent secondary vocational schools, 5 per cent technical colleges, 5 per cent universities). After checking and coding the questionnaires, the data were statistically evaluated by means of SPSS statistical software.

- **Interviews of organisers** of the discussion meetings that took place in the course of the second stage of the public discussion, and of those who were responsible for the activities taking place at the Institute for Information on Education. Questionnaires were gathered from 40 organisers and their responses subject to statistical analysis.

- **An opinion survey** was carried out among the education professionals concerning the Public Discussion Bulletin. The survey was conducted with the use of CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing). Between 15-18 February 1999 a total of 207 respondents were interviewed, selected proportionally according to regions in the Czech Republic and types of schools (in the same proportions as for the field research). One-third of the respondents were
comprised of school principals and directors, or their deputies, and two-thirds were made up of teachers. The data collected was processed using SPSS statistical software.

- Written interviews that followed after publication of the background studies. The following sets of questionnaires were processed without the use of any special statistical software: eight questionnaires completed by members of the Council for Educational Policy, seven completed by administrators of the background studies, seven filled in by members of the Basic Team, and four from high-level officials from the Ministry of Education.

- Media monitoring prepared by the Institute for Information on Education, which covered the period between 10 January 1999 and 15 February 2000. In total, 239 media items were analysed. Information taken from the monitoring was formalised with the help of special forms, which were later processed by means of SPSS statistical software.

- An opinion survey of the general public - two questions were asked within the regular FACTUM Omnibus Survey. From 28 January to 4 February 2000 a representative sample of 981 citizens of the Czech Republic over 18 years of age responded to the questions. After checking and coding, the questionnaires were processed by SPSS.

**Main findings:** As regards the subject of the consultation itself, namely education policy, the majority of citizens are inclined to feel that the system of education does need a change. This attitude is most notable among the younger generation and the younger middle-age generation, and among people with secondary school education and university degrees.

| Table 16. Citizens’ attitudes to reform of the education system reform according to age (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                       | 18-29   | 30-44   | 45-59   | 60 and more |
| Well-informed about discussion        | 55.6    | 56.4    | 51.6    | 39.0    |
| Feeling the need for change           | 66.7    | 66.5    | 52.3    | 50.7    |

| Table 17. Citizens’ attitudes to reform of the education system according to levels of education (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                       | Primary | Secondary | University |
| Well-informed about the discussion    | 45.6    | 61.3     | 68.4     |
| Feeling the need for change           | 55.0    | 67.9     | 70.7     |

The background studies have been, on the whole, been rated positively by the public. Six to seven out of every ten people who read the individual studies would recommend them to others for reading. Some of them evaluated the ability of the studies to trace future directions in development as somewhat better than their ability to diagnose the state of the Czech system of education. Readers judged the studies to be more difficult for the lay public than for the professionals, primarily owing to the frequent use of professional terminology. The non-professional public perceived the comprehensibility of the studies for the lay public less critically, and at the same time formulated the minimum amount of comments.

| Table 18. Evaluation of background studies: level of difficulty for the lay public (%) respondents |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                       | Very difficult | Difficult | Neither difficult nor easy | Easy | Very easy |
| All readers                           | 10.0    | 37.6    | 41.2    | 10.6 | 0.6     |
| Education professionals               | 12.9    | 42.6    | 39.6    | 5.0  | 0.0     |
| Lay public                            | 5.8     | 30.4    | 43.5    | 18.8 | 1.4     |

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Table 19. **Evaluation of background studies: level of difficulty for the professional public (% respondents)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Neither difficult nor easy</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All readers</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education professionals</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay public</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional public**

It may be said that the Bulletin became a suitable medium for informing the professional public. Nevertheless, all the possibilities offered through it have not yet been fully used. Only one-half of respondents felt that the Bulletin could help them to become familiar with the state of the system of education. The results showed that two-thirds actually obtained a copy of the Bulletin, while less than one-half of these read more than five issues, and roughly one half read one to four issues. The most frequently read material was the introductory text of the Minister of Education, and the background studies on Pre-school and Elementary Education. Management-level employees were not only the most informed, but they also had the most frequent access to professional journals and the Bulletin.

Table 20. **Sources of information about the ongoing discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Directors and deputies</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional journals</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School authorities</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars, courses</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21. **Number of sources of information used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Directors and deputies</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and more</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ex post evaluation of the background studies revealed some weak points in this process. Problems appeared concerning the format of the final (abbreviated) version destined for the lay public. One-half of respondents from the Basic Team had the feeling that the working teams did not have sufficient capacity and support for the task. The research also showed that during the preparation of the studies not much regard was given to the fact that even the most painstaking and scientific work must first of all attract attention, otherwise it cannot become the foundation for broader discussion.

**Role of the media**

The insufficient interest in the public discussion shown on the part of the media can to a large extent be explained by the lack of interesting or provocative topics offered by the campaign. The media...
has little interest in providing information on general ideas and visions of education; information it provided tended to be vague, public discussion was perceived as a specific problem belonging to education, and attempts to link it with the surrounding society were lacking. The Internet did not manage to come across in the public discussion of the White Book as a dominant communication channel. As one organiser commented, “People still work more with paper. Making copies of something and then distributing them is the main way of passing on information”.

Media monitoring showed that 90 per cent of the information on the ongoing public discussion was provided by the printed media, primarily state-wide and regional daily newspapers. The role of radio and television was smaller, which to a considerable degree corresponds to the low number of specialised media in the area of education. The number of items appearing in the media between October 1999 and February 2000 shows an overall increasing trend. Usually these concerned news items, and also interviews and comments. The authors of the contributions usually provided information from a neutral position, while the comments contained therein were generally positive. Among the institutions connected with the public discussion of the White Book, those with the highest profile in the media were scientific institutions (institutes, academies, universities) cited in 34.3 per cent of the cases, followed by associations, unions and centres (27.0 per cent of cases), with the Ministry of Education in third place (24.1 per cent of the cases).

Lack of media coverage and sustained efforts by the Ministry of Education to engage members of the general public (including parents and students) explain the restricted scope of the public consultation, which remained largely confined to the community of education professionals (e.g. teachers).

5.4. Participation by the general public

Among the public at large, half of the citizens were aware of the ongoing discussion on reform in education. Most frequently these were people aged 45 or less, and people with higher levels of education. The organisers of the discussion managed to arrange meetings to familiarise participants with the contents of the studies. In their opinion, these efforts did result in a general awareness in the country of the fact that the public discussion on the National Programme for the Development of Education was under way.

However, it became apparent that it is difficult to integrate the lay public into the public discussion. This is also connected with the most frequently employed forms of advertising activities, such as personal invitations and the Internet. The traditional unwillingness of the public to actively participate in processes of this type must also be mentioned in connection with the limited participation of individual citizens in the public discussion sessions. There are several reasons behind such unwillingness. First of all, people remain sceptical towards events of this type; they have a lack of faith in the ministries and in state institutions generally, which stems from previous negative experiences. People do not believe that their comments hold any weight. Another problem is that participation in this type of discussion demands a great deal of effort, it necessitates the formulation of specific comments, their repeated assertion, and an equally consistent follow-up on whether and how the comments have been dealt with. Few people, and not all civil society organisations, have the capacity for this kind of systematic and demanding work.

Several observers have noted that given the fact that this was the first project of this type to be run in the Czech Republic at the national level, it is possible to consider the public consultation programme a success. The exercise was less positively evaluated by representatives from the field of education and civil society organisations, who felt the public discussion was weak and insufficient, and was even incapable of actually providing the public with information. In the opinion of one participating non-governmental organisation (NGO), society-wide discussion was lacking altogether, as the project never managed to address the public outside the field of education, due to the fact that the entire issue was framed incorrectly. The chairman of another NGO (The Union of Parents) describes his impressions from the discussion campaigns thus: “After witnessing the first public meeting I realised that this is really a challenge for a dozen, after a year maybe for hundreds, but by no means for ten million”.
On the basis of the existing evaluation reports, and additional interviews with several key participants in the process, it is possible to confirm that the holding of a broad public discussion with the intention of creating a new form of education policy in the Czech Republic has been quite positively received by the public on the whole. The introduction of this kind of broad-based discussion is perceived as an important cultural shift in the area of communication between state administration and the public. Neither the course nor the outcome of the discussion has been evaluated altogether negatively, even though both have received criticism from a number of quarters.

The discussion sessions organised throughout the country were positively evaluated, particularly by those who organised them. The significance of personal contact in the discussion on a new education policy, and also the fruitfulness of these debates, deserves emphasis here. Of equal importance is the fact that a large proportion of these activities were organised and initiated from the bottom up, for the most part by school administrations, pedagogical centres, teachers’ associations and schools. According to research from the SOFRES-FACTUM agency, which surveyed forty organisers of discussion sessions, these sessions were considered to be very useful. In contrast, the roundtables organised in Prague were perceived to be more focused on presentations of the White Book itself, often for the benefit of the media, than on providing real opportunities for discussion.

Finally, it is of interest to note that politicians expressed little interest in the public discussions on the White Book, as evidenced by their limited participation in the parliamentary seminar held in February 2000, where the only members of parliament present were those scheduled to speak. While it had originally been planned to hold three parliamentary seminars, only one was ultimately organised.

Conclusions

The eleven years of societal transformation in the Czech Republic have witnessed some cases of two-way communication between the government and citizens. Neither of the two partners is accustomed to such communication, nor have they developed the necessary skills to effectively engage in it. In the case examined here the main target of the central administration's communication efforts consisted mostly of other administrative bodies, and the bulk of such communication has been fairly direct. The public is only gradually being perceived as a necessary partner for consultation in government policy-making. Such developments on the government’s side have been paralleled by an equally slow process of maturation on the part of citizens. Time has been needed to develop the level of civic self-confidence necessary for such a dialogue to be possible and become fully emancipated from the passive attitude towards the state and public administration that prevailed in the country for half a century. Submissive silence and distrust have gradually been substituted by a more active approach but, as this case study illustrates, a long process of trust-building will be needed to mutually strengthen government-citizen relations.

Innovative aspects and enduring obstacles

These first attempts to generate public discussion at the national level in the Czech Republic, as represented by public consultation on the White Book on Education Policy, have represented a valuable learning experience. Among the positive aspects of the public information and consultation campaign the following may be highlighted:

- The very fact that the Ministry of Education, as part of the state administration, made the decision to initiate this kind of discussion, to open itself up to the public and attempt to break through the barriers of distrust.

- This kind of project is a new experience, both for the organisers and for the general public - the “Challenge for Ten Million” “stirred up” the professional community, and to some degree even the lay public, and brought enough attention to the subject of national education reform that even the media gained an interest in it.
The innovative form of co-operation established between a ministry and non-governmental organisations (such as the Open Society Fund) in organising public information and consultation may be seen as an important and promising development.

At the same time, the experience of public consultation on the White Book illustrates that a number of obstacles to achieving effective public participation in the Czech Republic still remain, including:

- An enduring distrust on the part of citizens toward the public administration and policy documents that have, for the most part, been prepared and adopted without the participation of the public.
- Citizens are not used to being asked to actively participate in public discussions in policy-making.
- The public administration is inexperienced in managing public consultation exercises.

**Conditions for successful public information and consultation**

This case study illustrates how several factors contribute to successful public consultation, and identifies the need for:

- A structured discussion oriented to a clearly defined target population based on concrete topics and using appropriate tools.
- A detailed project plan which calls for evaluation of the results achieved.
- Sufficient financial resources and a clear budget.
- Professional and enthusiastic management.
- Full public information on the issue under discussion, the programme of consultation and official contact points.
- Feedback on each contribution made to the discussion – to build trust in the process, everyone must be informed about the fate of his or her contribution.

Public consultation should be regarded as an important measure not only to inform, and be informed, on specific issues for policy-making - but also as an important tool for building trust between the key participants. For public discussion to be used effectively as a tool to develop greater trust in government-citizens relations, an appropriate methodology is needed. To be effective, it requires sufficient professional expertise, equipment, financial resources and time.

The decision to launch public consultation during the preparation of the White Book proved to be right, and the information gathered represented a useful input into the policy-making process. The public response was positive, although not as intensive as had been initially expected. While the professionals involved were motivated and readily reacted, it was more difficult to engage the public at large in the discussion. To be successful in this respect, the issues have to be expressed in a comprehensible way so as to attract the attention of lay persons as well. An important component of any public discussion, one that prepares the ground for future consultations, is the existence of a clear mechanism for providing feedback to the participating public. Attempting an “ornamental” discussion, with no visible impact whatsoever, would be a safe way to discredit any such future efforts.

Of course, the scale and methods of the consultation have to be tailored to the policy problem in question and also to the available organisational and financial resources. The campaign analysed in this case study was probably rather exceptional as regards its ambitious scale and structure. Future public consultations – should they become a more frequent practice – would probably have to make do with a more modest approach.

Several national-level policy issues are now, or will soon be, emerging in the Czech Republic for which a broad public discussion would be desirable. One example is the reform of the pension system which is overdue given the rapidly ageing Czech population and whose social and political impact looms large. On the local level, public consultation should be a generally accepted stage in the process of spatial planning, particularly in urban areas and if environmentally sensitive issues are concerned.
Public consultation organised in the Czech Republic during the preparation of a Government White Book on Educational Policy was one of the first large-scale efforts to draw both the professional as well as the general public into the process of public policy-making. The lessons learned during this public discussion, the methods used to communicate with both the professional and general public, and the procedures used for the assessment of the consultation can thus become a source of inspiration for organising discussion on other public policy issues. They may also be of interest for policy-makers in other countries, of course, with due respect to differences in national contexts.
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