

# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (CIE)

(content analysis of the media coverage in the period from January 2014  
to July 2017)

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## AIM OF THE ANALYSIS

The aim of the content analysis is to review the quality and intensity of the debate about inclusive education in the last three and a half years – a period that started with the public consultations on the new Pre-school and School Education Act in 2014, until the time when the topic became one of the central issues for the public debate on education in 2017.

## METHODS OF STUDY

The full texts of articles published from January 2014 to July 2017 were reviewed. We used a database which processes regular press, electronic and internet media in a comprehensive and in-depth manner.

Our study employed some of the obligatory elements of any content analysis (frequency of use of certain words and/or phrases, quantitative comparisons in chronological and other terms) and we also focused on attitudes expressed both by the society and by the media. Our goal was to gain insights running deeper than the plain text of the news, to make analyses and draw conclusions that may be of benefit to the CIE activities.

Below is a list of words and phrases (and their derivatives) used to perform the search, which are at the roots of this study:

- ✓ *Children with disabilities*
- ✓ *Special educational needs*
- ✓ *Access to education*
- ✓ *Inclusive education*
- ✓ *Resource teachers*
- ✓ *Centre for Inclusive Education*
- ✓ *CIE and Iva Boneva*

## ARTICLES AND SOURCES

Below is data about the number of articles and sources which were processed for the purposes of this study.

Total number of articles: **43154**

Number of articles, breakdown by years:

- 2014 - **7509**
- 2015 - **11123**
- 2016 - **15521**
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) - **9001**

Number of articles, breakdown by information channels:

- Press - **4774**
- Radio - **114**
- Television - **326**
- Internet - **37940**

Number of articles, breakdown by information channels by years:

- Press
  - 2014 - **1358**
  - 2015 - **1274**
  - 2016 - **1404**
  - 2017 (until July, inclusive) - **738**
- Radio
  - 2014 - **40**
  - 2015 - **16**
  - 2016 - **18**
  - 2017 (until July, inclusive) - **40**
- Television
  - 2014 - **82**
  - 2015 - **82**
  - 2016 - **89**
  - 2017 (until July, inclusive) - **73**
- Internet
  - 2014 - **6029**
  - 2015 - **9751**
  - 2016 - **14010**
  - 2017 (until July, inclusive) – **8150**

**Share of increased number of articles compared to a previous period (%):**

2015 compared to 2014: **48%**

2016 compared to 2015: **40%**

2017 compared 2016: **no change**

*\* The 2017 forecast result is based on the results in the first seven months. The same ratio has been applied to the remaining 5 months of the year.*

The above data clearly shows considerable growth in the number of articles – almost twofold since 2016 compared to the first year of the study. The situation in 2017 was the same as that in the preceding year, however it should be noted at this point that the Ordinance on Inclusive Education was amended in October 2017 and this topic is expected to generate multiple articles.

**REFERENCES TO THE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES IN TEXTS.  
COMPARISON OF USE THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.**

***Children with disabilities.*** This includes derivatives *child with disabilities, disabilities in children, etc.*

➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 46300
- 2014 - 6504
- 2015 -11716
- 2016 - 19749
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) - 8331

This is the most recurrent topic. It shows an upward trend of results throughout the years, which is good, to say the least; it indicates that our society is increasingly interested in children with disabilities. Another reason is the process of taking children out of institutions and placing them in FTACs (Family-Type Accommodation Centres) – deinstitutionalization, which was broadly covered by the media and was also mentioned in the context of children’s access to education. Year 2016 marked a peak in that regard due to the final close-down of the institutions for children with disabilities and the debates on the new Education act of which inclusive education is a part.

***Special educational needs***

➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 9927
- 2014 - 1966

- 2015 - 2825
- 2016 - 3180
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) - 1956

The number of articles concerning children with special educational needs shows an increasing trend every year. The reason for this is the debate and the legislation related to inclusive education, which continued throughout 2017 too. On the other hand, however, the articles mentioning this phrase tackle specific cases of aggression (especially in 2017).

### ***Access to education***

#### ➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 6412
- 2014 - 984
- 2015 - 1797
- 2016 - 2406
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) - 1225

The trend resembles that of *special educational needs*. The topics dealing with access to education are discussed more often and in greater depth. The adoption of the Pre-School and School Education Act, alongside the ensuing debates, and of the Ordinance on Inclusive Education, triggered more talk within the society about children's access to education. The increased presence of "access to education" in the last year is due also to the new ministerial order that was voted in July 2015 and that regarded the Mechanism of collaboration of institutions for reach of the students out of school and their replacement in the educational institutions.

### ***Resource teachers.***

#### ➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 3103
- 2014 - 409
- 2015 - 1101
- 2016 - 831
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) – 762

The largest number of references to *resource teachers* is observed in 2015; this was the year of debates prior to adopting the Pre-School and School Education Act. Year 2017 also marks a peak of references to this topic due to the issue of aggression and how to handle aggression with the help of resource teachers, and also surrounding the debates on the Ordinance on Inclusive Education.

### ***Inclusive education.***

➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 5727
- 2014 - 307
- 2015 - 810
- 2016 - 2427
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) – 2183

Given the modest number of 300 references in 2014, only three years later *inclusive education* was mentioned ten times more. This term is by now well established and circulates freely in the speech of both the government and the media. The society is excited, it criticizes some aspects of the relevant legislation, and the topic is subject of ongoing discussions. This is fully valid for 2017 too, prompted by the amendments to the Ordinance on Inclusive Education.

***Centre for Inclusive Education.*** This includes *CIE* (the Centre's abbreviation) and *Iva Boneva* (Executive Director).

➤ **Number of references by years:**

- Total: 1779
- 2014 - 249
- 2015 - 343
- 2016 - 767
- 2017 (until July, inclusive) – 420

In 2014 the term *inclusive education* was referred to mostly because the Centre was mentioned. Gradually, during the enhanced legislative debates related to the term and its institutionalization, its use by the media also increased marking a peak in 2016 and not subsiding in 2017. Figures show that in the past two years the name of the Centre was mentioned several times more; this is the result not only of its specific activities and awareness campaigns but also of its statements on particular poignant issues.

## **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: RELATED KEY TOPICS AND EVENTS IN EACH YEAR OF THE STUDY**

### **2014: TAKING CHILDREN OUT OF INSTITUTIONS – DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION**

- In May 2014 there was more and deeper talk about inclusive education, a trend that markedly increased until in the second half of the year this term was mentioned over 200 times compared to 40 times in the first half.

At that stage, the topic of aggression in schools and inclusion of “problem” children was hardly covered (the word *aggression* was mentioned only 33 times in the period October-December) unlike 2017 when the number of references reached 863 times in the first quarter alone!

### ***Well covered topics in 2014***

Taking children out of institutions and placing them in FTACs; specific initiatives by foundations for building up playgrounds meant for children with disabilities; gifts and gestures shown to children with disabilities in the context of holidays such as Baba Marta (1 March), Easter, Children’s Day (1 June), Christmas (holiday-related coverage remains abundant in the successive years too); CIE’s representative survey; submission of the pre-school and school education bill by GERB political party.

## **2015: ADOPTION OF THE PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL EDUCATION ACT**

A major topic covered by the media in 2015 was the debate that flared up (in the first quarter of the year alone, the full name of the Act was mentioned over 100 times) with regard to the adoption of the Pre-School and School Education Act. Its first reading in the Parliament was in the beginning of February, its second reading started in the beginning of September, and it was finally adopted in October. Multiple analyses and clarifications followed by the government, by non-governmental organisations and media alike, using all kinds of communication channels. Ultimately, the people in power took into consideration some of the demands of the stakeholders (teachers, parents, the overall community).

- At the end of January, the protest of resource teachers was fully covered (the phrase *resource teachers* was mentioned 700 times in the first quarter of the year alone). In this case the government took notice of the public opinion and the voice of those most affected, and gave up its plans to close down the resource centres. The latter are now regional centres of inclusive education.
  - ***Resource teachers bracing themselves up for protest, 25.01.2015, Telegraph***
  - ***Resource centres remain part of MoE, 04.02.2015, www.dariknews.bg***
  - ***GERB drops the idea of closing down resource centres, 05.02.2015, Sega***
  
- Another broadly discussed aspect was the closing of the so-called special needs schools; they were mentioned over 400 times in the first quarter of the year alone.
  - ***Law-makers, hands off the most vulnerable community! Children with disabilities number almost 40 000 and it would be a crime to deny them special care and approach in their education, 19.01.2015, www.komentator***
  - ***Should special needs schools close down?, 23.01.2015, Desant***
  - ***Strike in special needs schools, 10.02.2015, Maritza***

- This is the year when the CIE affirmed its role and involvement in the legislative changes through a number of initiatives that prompted extremely broad response. One cannot help but notice that the Centre's activities tend to attract more coverage whenever representatives of the government are involved.
- **Round table on “Inclusive Education - the Education of 21<sup>st</sup> Century” held at the National Assembly, 27.03.2015, [www.focus-news.net](http://www.focus-news.net)**
- **Inclusive schools are feasible model in Bulgaria too, 11.09.2015, [www.bnr.bg](http://www.bnr.bg)**
- **Hard-to-grasp teaching content is serious problem, teachers say, 14.09.2015, [www.vsichkinovini.com](http://www.vsichkinovini.com)**
- **One school for all, or how inclusive school environment is built in Bulgaria, 12.12.2015, [www.vsichkinovini.com](http://www.vsichkinovini.com)**
- The adoption of the Act was discussed at great length (in the last quarter of the year alone, the Act was mentioned over 100 times); media seem to have found a way to handle the term “inclusive education” (810 references for the whole year – more than twofold increase compared to the preceding year) following a number of explanatory campaigns by various sources – the government, the non-profit sector, etc.
- **Possibly more than 5 children with disabilities in single classroom, 22.06.2015, [www.gramophon.com](http://www.gramophon.com)**
- **Disputes over School Act's name marked its second reading, 02.09.2015 г., [www.e-novinar.com](http://www.e-novinar.com)**
- **Pupils up to fourth grade are not to repeat same school year, 17.09.2015, [www.mediapool.bg](http://www.mediapool.bg)**
- **Statement by National Association of Resource Teachers Bulgaria on new pre-school and school education law, 16.10.2015, [www.ngobg.info](http://www.ngobg.info)**
- **Milena Damyanova: we launch inclusive education process. Special needs schools to become educational support centres, said Education Committee Chair, 13.02.2015, [www.kmeta.bg](http://www.kmeta.bg)**
- **First time ever, schools get autonomy in training. Separate educational standard to apply to study of literary Bulgarian language, 08.04.2015, [www.pleven.utre.bg](http://www.pleven.utre.bg)**
- **RB: Money for education to follow child, irrespective of school type, 05.10.2015, [www.cross.bg](http://www.cross.bg)**
- Despite all positive trends, the end of the year saw almost simultaneous release of articles which illustrate divided attitudes and oftentimes totally opposite perspectives to the same issue, i.e. education in Bulgaria.
- **EC: Bulgarian education in urgent need of reform, 12.11.2015, [www.vsichkinovini.com](http://www.vsichkinovini.com)**
- **European experts eye positively education reform, 13.11.2015, [www.livenews.bg](http://www.livenews.bg)**

### **Well covered topics in 2015**

All topics dealing with the adoption of the Pre-School and School Education Act: resource teachers' protest, explanatory texts and awareness campaigns, private education; all governmental initiatives on education, CIE activities; specific cases of school aggression; parents' protests and threats to stop their children going to school.

### **2016: THE YEAR OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

The beginning of 2016 saw the official closing of all Bulgarian institutions for children with disabilities; however, the highlight of the year was the entry into force of the Pre-School and School Education Act in August (in this period alone, there were 150 references of the Act's full title and hundreds of derivatives such as "Education Act", "Law on Education", etc.) and the excitement surrounding the Ordinance on Inclusive Education. This is also the time when the CIE enhanced its activities and made its firm appearance on the educational stage, something that the media noticed and therefore the activities of the Centre for Inclusive Education were covered extensively (767 instances of mentioning throughout the year, which accounts for twice as much compared to 2015). This is the time when any talk of inclusion is in fashion, although according to the Centre, there is no shared understanding of what inclusive education is and how it should happen.

- In the course of the year, depending on the government's law-making activities (entry into force of the Act and the Ordinance), the media released commentaries, analyses, discussions on inclusive education. This was the hottest topic which had something to do with education in general.
- **UNICEF and MoE set to work together towards inclusion of children with difficulties, 06.04.2016, [www.novini.dir.bg](http://www.novini.dir.bg)**
- **First working meeting to discuss state educational standard of inclusive education, [www.ngobg.info](http://www.ngobg.info)**
- **Mandatory summer training of underperforming pupils in primary education, 25.07.2016, [www.e-79.com](http://www.e-79.com)**
- **State educational standard of inclusive education ready, 17.08.2016 [www.news.ibox.bg](http://www.news.ibox.bg)**
- Throughout the year, the Centre for Inclusive Education launched initiatives and awareness campaigns, and was constantly in the media spotlight. The national representative survey which had its findings published in September (from July to September, *inclusive education* was mentioned over 500 times) provoked extensive response and interest, as did the Centre's round tables and press conferences in general.



- *Working visit to Bulgaria at the invitation of the Centre for Inclusive Education, 02.03.2016, [www.ngobg.info](http://www.ngobg.info)*
- *Centre for Inclusive Education launches open lesson on prevention of discrimination in schools, 25.03.2016, [www.alfarss.net](http://www.alfarss.net)*
- *Days of Inclusion 2016 National Campaign launched, 12.04.2016, [www.ngobg.info](http://www.ngobg.info)*
- *2016 report card: inclusive education gets a mark of good (3.50 points), 20.04.2016, [www.ngobg.info](http://www.ngobg.info)*
- *“Why should I go to school?” – national representative survey of six-graders’ attitudes, 08.09.2016, [www.cross.bg](http://www.cross.bg)*
- *Why would 45% of six-graders escape at any opportunity? 13.09.2016, [www.bebok.eu](http://www.bebok.eu)*
- *Iva Boneva: inclusion matters in order to have healthy, viable and solidary society, 26.09.2016, [www.dnevnik.bg](http://www.dnevnik.bg)*
- *Centre for Inclusive Education to launch free online course “Getting familiar with inclusive education”, 28.09.2016, [www.az-deteto.bg](http://www.az-deteto.bg)*

### **Well covered topics in 2016**

Closing down the last children’s institutions; legislation in the field of education and inclusive education; all initiatives and activities of the Centre for Inclusive Education.

## **2017: HOW IS INCLUSION SUPPOSED TO WORK OUT IN THE CASE OF AGGRESSION?**

In 2017 we witnessed a case where the lack of suitable response from the school management and the institutions to the actions of a single child (and the ensuing response by the society) resulted in revision of a whole Ordinance. The case concerns 19<sup>th</sup> Secondary School where the topic of school aggression was again prompted by a child with SEN, while the answer to the question “Are institutions, schools, non-governmental organisations ready to cope with aggression in schools?” proved negative. Each party involved tries to find a way out of this problem: teachers protest, school principals submit resignations, the Ministry of Education (MoE) amends regulations and puts the blame on child protection institutions, parents protest and send threatening messages, while non-governmental organisations remain silent or intervene a bit too late. Media however kept no silence and got to the bottom of this case and others like it. By 2017 the term “inclusive education” sounded no longer exotic and unfamiliar but rather something to work on, assert and often respond immediately to. The term is already “institutionalized”, especially compared to the initial year of the study, only three years earlier.

- The studied period includes July but it can be considered representative because this month marks the end of the school year. The inclusive education Ordinance was

amended in October 2017, thus closing up a three-year cycle. In 2017, media attention was mostly focused on a couple of cases: the one mentioned above at 19<sup>th</sup> Secondary School (this school was mentioned 60 times only in the first month of the year) where an aggressive child harassed his classmates, and the death of a child at 52<sup>nd</sup> Secondary School (over 200 times within a single month, right after the tragic incident until end-March).

- ***Parents of all children in class refuse to let them go to school because of harassment by classmate, 24.01.2017, [www.banker.bg](http://www.banker.bg)***
- ***Catch 22 for “different” children, 25.01.2017, Monitor***
- ***National Network for Children: moving children to other schools indicates fear of differences, 03.02.2017, [www.bulbox.net](http://www.bulbox.net)***
- ***Teachers in 19<sup>th</sup> Secondary School in Sofia frown on moving problem-prone child, 07.02.2017, [www.dnevnik.bg](http://www.dnevnik.bg)***
- ***National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children approved, 08.02.2017, [www.banker.bg](http://www.banker.bg)***
- ***Following incident with child, teachers obliged to hold medical consultation, 28.02.2017, [www.news.varna24.bg](http://www.news.varna24.bg)***
- ***Open letter: tragedy at 52<sup>nd</sup> school is tragedy of our whole society, 02.03.2017, [www.alfarss.net](http://www.alfarss.net)***
- ***After the tragedy with little Gaby: her school attempts to conceal scandal! 02.03.2017, [www.blitz.bg](http://www.blitz.bg)***
  
- This led to wide discussions, protests by teachers, principals, parents. The government yielded under the pressure of the society and the professional community and amended the Ordinance on Inclusive Education.
- ***Teachers call for ending pervasive bureaucracy in Bulgarian schools, 25.05.2017, [www.alfarss.net](http://www.alfarss.net)***
- ***Educators demand change of Inclusive Education Ordinance, 07.03.2017, [www.standartnews.com](http://www.standartnews.com)***
- ***Konstantin Yankov, BTU: municipal teachers on stand-by for protests, 12.04.2017, [www.focus-radio.net](http://www.focus-radio.net)***
- ***BSP MP Donka Simeonova: Inclusive Education Ordinance must be revoked, 20.06.2017, [www.varna.rep.bg](http://www.varna.rep.bg)***
  
- The MoE carried on with explanatory campaigns concerning still unclear aspects of the Pre-School and School Education Act, while it also transferred the responsibility of child aggression in schools to parents; MoE registers the need for special efforts and measures for prevention and reaction to aggressive behaviour at school.

- *Experts on inclusive education note resistance to its introduction, 06.03.2017, [www.bnr.bg](http://www.bnr.bg)*
  - *Education Ministry refutes info about layoffs of 9000 teachers, 16.03.2017, [www.iconomist.bg](http://www.iconomist.bg)*
  - *Education Ministry proposes 22 measures to counter school aggression – 12.00 o'clock news, 10.04.2017, BNR*
  - *MoE: parents considered key factor to prevent school aggression, 12.04.2017, [www.bulgaria.actualno.com](http://www.bulgaria.actualno.com)*
- In this context the Centre for Inclusive Education launched several initiatives; the second of them, *The Teacher Who Loves All His Students*, did prompt media response; the initiative was mentioned 159 times (in total, including use of both the definite and indefinite article with the word *teacher*).
- *Book “The giraffe who could not fit into the book” helps children with learning difficulties, 12.01.2017, [www.alfarss.net](http://www.alfarss.net)*
  - *Students all over Bulgaria in search of Teacher Who Loves All, 05.04.2017 [www.alfarss.net](http://www.alfarss.net)*
  - *Wanted: The Teacher Who Loves All, 05.04.2017 [www.dariknews.bg](http://www.dariknews.bg)*
  - *Galina Angelova is The Teacher Who Loves All (video), [www.b2bmedia.bg](http://www.b2bmedia.bg)*

### **Well covered topics in 2017**

School aggression – apart from the specific cases, also all follow-up actions of affected parties; the CIE initiative on *The Teacher Who Loves All His Students*.

## **KEY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ACTORS AND THEIR MEDIA IMAGE**

### **PARENTS: THREATS INSTEAD OF DIALOGUE – LACK OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATON WITH PARENTS**

According to the findings of this study, the following image of parents has been established in the media: most of them fail to pay real attention to their children, they initiate no contacts with institutions, other parents, teachers and school principals, but if their children happen to fall victims of aggression by other children, they “take matters into their own hands”. In this case their main weapon is their own children; they start blackmailing the school claiming that their children will leave the school or stop attending classes if their demands are not met. They are aware of their strength whenever they are united in their demands. Their protests are always widely covered – media like giving them a voice because this is often equated to a response of a democratic society. The impression is that parents often tend to act by threats rather by dialogue. This all indicates poor or no communication along the chain of school – parents and poorly performing school boards, if they exist in reality at all. In large cities in particular, parents avoid frequent contacts with schools except for cases when they

feel that their children are truly endangered. This often occurs during spells of panic attack and lack of information – something that schools themselves are also to blame for.

**Possible actions:** national parent inclusion campaigns, work with schools towards improving teachers' and principals' initiative with regard to parents (more frequent contacts, sending e-mails about problems, children with SEN, etc.).

## **CHILDREN WITH SEN: ABSENCE OF A CLEAR IDEA WHO THEY ARE AND HOW TO INCLUDE THEM**

Up until 2014, children with disabilities were made to look like they were victims of the system, media blew the horn of closing down child institutions, etc. Once children were reallocated to FTACs (Family-Type Accommodation Centres), the noise subsided a bit and the focus was redirected to abandonment of babies and their adoption. Following descriptions of glitzy centres and their official inauguration by government representatives, articles tended to mostly highlight specific donations and individual projects. Articles about such children grow in numbers routinely on particular days of the year when children inevitably get attention and gifts. There was the impression that children with disabilities got moved from one place to a nicer place where they would get better care, while they remain segregated. It was not explicitly clear in the articles published by the media what exactly would happen in those Family Type Accommodation Centres, apart from individual cases of understaffed Centres or breach of regulations.

The articles in this study also give no clear idea of how exactly children with SEN would be included (this may be also due to the fact that the real process starts only now, following the latest legislative amendments), what change this would imply for their classmates, teachers, etc.

An unpleasant trend emerged too in 2017, that of considering children with SEN to be more aggressive, hard to control and potentially harmful to others. Then inevitable questions start circulating in the public space: should the majority get defended at the expense of a single child and is it imperative to defend anyone at all?

**Possible actions:** detailed study and monitoring of FTAC activities; a campaign on the results of inclusive education – good practices, case studies, opinions of the rest of children.

## **SCHOOL: LOVED AND HATED AT THE SAME TIME**

- ***95% of six-graders think it's important to go to school, however 45% would escape at any opportunity, 12.09.2016, [www.cross.bg](http://www.cross.bg)***

This article's headline (the result of a CIE study) clearly shows not only children's attitudes to school but also the attitude of the whole society. Schools are still perceived to be the necessary evil where children study and can be included, but where bad things could happen

to them too. A deeper look into the materials in this period leaves the impression that there are two separate school groups: one of the school principal and the school administration, and the other of the teachers. It is a rare case that teachers and principals speak in the same voice; and that ultimately gives no good credit to this truly important institution. There were also situations where teachers and principals happened to conceal or delay important information, as it turned out later, which had undesirable consequences. Principals leave the impression of being people whose actions are triggered by fear of being fired, sanctioned or faced by angry parents. Another impression one is left with is that schools still lack mechanisms (even adequate environment) and knowledge to cope with the new requirements of inclusive education. Principals criticize educational legislation, teachers go on strikes, the MoE amends regulations, then criticism emerges again, etc.

**Possible actions:** direct work with a maximum number of principals and teachers; targeted projects to improve communication between school principals and teachers and between school principals and parents.

#### **THE EXECUTIVE POWER: SUCCUMBS TO PRESSURE**

The processes surrounding the adoption of the Ordinance on Inclusive Education are remarkable in two key aspects. Firstly, documents were tabled for discussion without prior consideration of different points of view or any public discussions in advance. Secondly, once such documents were enforced, the MoE was inclined to amend any bill or ordinance, albeit superfluously, because of threats, protests and criticism that followed. This could be interpreted on the one hand as taking notice of the public opinion and that of direct stakeholders, but on the other as lack of preparation and much too easy a step back from stated promises and positions due to uncertainty and lack of competence. Still, the executive and legislative power in Bulgaria are finally embarking on long-delayed changes of the legislation that regulates inclusive education.

**Possible actions:** more joint activities (round tables, press conferences, etc.) with MoE representatives, lobbying in favour of specific legislative initiatives, meetings with resource teachers, school principals, parents, NGOs in order to build a complete picture and proposals for discussions with the MoE.

#### **MEDIA: ALWAYS THE SAME**

There will always be media that side with tabloid journalism and media that offer in-depth analyses and different perspectives. It depends on their editorial policies, concepts, readers and market positioning (whether of regional or national coverage), on their publishers, advertisers, etc. In this sense, the response of the media to the topic in the studied period is completely predictable: some media highlighted tabloidized content, others stressed bad

practice alone, yet other explored the topic extensively, etc. In general, apart from the media close to the government or party-related publications, one of the tasks of the media is to criticize the people in power; in this sense, all criticism addressed to the government and the institutions, particularly that prompted by child aggression, was to be expected. It is typical of the internet to offer news in the making, but people still tend to look for more reliable information from other sources. This is why websites and e-portals often quote electronic or printed media.

In the context of this study, there are media that pay more attention to inclusive education, and others that shy away from the topic or tackle its negative aspects mostly.

**Possible actions:** contacts with as many journalists profiled in education as possible; workshops and conferences – journalists love to be in the spotlight.

### **CIE: FIRST BIG SUCCESS ACHIEVED FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Even by looking at the figures of the quoted articles, it is clear the CIE is an important element of the developments of inclusive education in Bulgaria. The name of the Centre for Inclusive Education is by now much more familiar to the media and the public alike. The very term was almost unfamiliar years ago and while in 2014 it was referred to mostly in relation to the Centre's activities, now it is institutionalized by way of a legislative framework of education.

The contribution of the Centre can be summarized in three main directions:

- Contribution in the field of new practices;
- Contribution for legislation policies and initiatives;
- Contribution in increasing the civil society participation and consolidation of the citizens' voice for inclusive education, CIE is able to wake up the attention to the topic of inclusive education also of the other stakeholders in the field of education and civil society and to coordinate the joint advocacy actions.

Media image and the Centre's activities indicate that successful were the conceptual texts and studies and specific initiatives. It is often the case though that people get confused by complicated topics and are not really eager about long-term perspectives. They want to see something happening right now, even if this sometimes serves the sole purpose of easing their conscience.

The articles reveal that studies, press conferences and round tables, especially those where government representatives show up, are successful elements of broad media coverage of CIE.

By adopting the Act and the Ordinance related to inclusive education, Bulgarian education reached a milestone along the way. This, however, will have to be affirmed from now on and the legislation will have to be implemented in a principally unwelcoming and conflict-torn

environment. The real discussion on quality inclusive education in its substance has not started yet, inclusive education may be perceived as a platform to organize the reform in education, for example. The CIE should find its place there using specific strategies for crisis response in schools.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that inclusive education in Bulgaria went a long way just in three years' time. Starting with occasional references to the term in 2014, it reached the point of stormy responses and extensive media coverage of laws and strategies in 2017. It is yet to see how the stakeholders in this process – government, parents, schools, non-governmental organisations – will joint their efforts even further so that inclusive education is implemented more easily and clearly for all.

In this context, the CIE proved to be a reliable strategic partner of all actors in the process of inclusive education. In 2018 the Centre will strive to strengthen its positions and offer even more specific practices and initiatives during the introduction of the legislative framework in schools.

## HOW THE PRACTITIONERS IN EDUCATION, EXPERTS AND PROFESSORS READ THE ANALYSIS

*Anet Marinova:*

„In this study for me there are three main lines:

One is the line **Disability – Special educational needs – Aggression**: this line identifies these children as problematic, as causing aggression. The term Special educational needs relates to deficit, rigidity and problem for the system.

The other line is: **The parents of “the other children” – The teachers and the management of the relationships in the classroom – The special educational needs**. Here we encounter the attitudes in this environment from one side and the lack of professional response of the school, respectively of the school management from the other.

And the third line is related to the “institutionalization” of **inclusive education as an obstacle for change**. Inclusive education stays a part – now it is an appendix of the system that threatens to tear apart its entirety, while it can be a platform to organize the reform of the system – with inclusive education we may organize the problem with school drop out for example.”

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*Dani Koleva:*

„Walk the talk!

What impressed me the most are the findings that lead to the need to go over the words and good intentions and to make efforts so that these intentions can happen in the best way in practice.

We use the same words, but are we talking in the same language? The analysis clearly shows that inclusive education becomes a widely accepted term and it is even in the legislation, but at the same time it is visible that the debates and discussions on the topic throughout the years are mostly focused on the reform of the structures, roles and responsibilities of the specialists and other participants, rather than on the inclusion as a process, how it will happen in practice and what it will change for children.

An example is the disturbing tendency of 2017 highlighted in the analysis – that the children with SEN are presented as aggressive, out-of-control and creating risks for the others. This led again to questions and proposals of problem solving of the type “extinguishing the fire” which creates the risk to bring us back and/or to generate even more serious problems. Instead of the questions if the children with SEN should study with the other students, for or against the video-cameras in schools, we had to open the space for moderated discussions of experts’ opinions of why children manifest aggressive behavior or violence, how to prevent the reasons for these and how to manage effectively these behaviors, and stop passing the “hot potato” from one school to the other.

Partnering with parents. Often, parents of children with non-desired behavior are accused of refusing aid, instead of explore in depth how they are being offered help, what does "refuse" mean and those who offer help, what have they done and achieved with the child? Talking through the prism of guilty - innocent, right - wrong, is actually the real problem whose manifestation is often visible in the uniting of adults against children. In order for the partnership with parents to be a reality, not a cliché or good wishes, the MoE should encourage and support every kindergarten and schools to develop a comprehensive policy for working with parents. Building a partnership between family and school can only happen by building trust between them, and this is a process that needs planning, skills, time and space. This process must have clear goals, expected results, and be effectively managed, otherwise we risk losing ourselves to the field of good intentions, and, as the Smiling Cat of Alice in Wonderland says - Depends a good deal on where you want to get to and if you do not know where, then you will end up somewhere else."

***Dani Koleva** is Program Director at the National Network for Children, as of January 2018, the focus of her work is on prevention of violence against children. She has over 16 years of field experience in deinstitutionalization and development of preventive and alternative services for children and families, as well as significant practical and management experience in the field of children's rights, advocacy and project and program evaluation.*

*Ivaylo Kiskinov:*

„In the analysis clearly can be seen several positive tendencies in regards to the increased public attention to the topic of inclusive education:

- Commitment of the legislative and executive power to the inclusive education;
- Activity of the civil society sector;
- Widely coverage of the discussions of the educational reform.

The attentive reading of the document shows also several serious problems in regards to the media representation of the topic of inclusive education.



1. It impresses the lack of profound understanding of the concept of inclusive education. Here some accents:

- The students with SEN – what SEN includes? The media are focused on the children with non-desired behavior or disability. Out of the attention are the gifted students.
- Often the aggressive behavior is related to special needs which lead to non-justified fear among parents, teachers, school principals and local communities.
- There is no profound understanding of the needs of children with SEN to work with a wide range of specialists. The talk is only about resource teachers.

2. There is a lack of dialogue between the educational institutions and parents. The media and legislation fog on the topic is more than disturbing. In the focus of the media are mostly the conflict between the stakeholders in the educational process, while at the same time rarely are presented good practices of cooperation – a problem related to the communication with the media but also to the insane attention to the dramatic. Unfortunately even the publicly owned media are not interested in informative way to the topic.

3. The legislative and executive power – in the public area the vision of the state to the education is lacking.

- In their public appearance the state experts in the field of inclusive education are putting the accent to the necessity to follow procedures that are related to non-needed documentation. The reaction of large part of the teachers and principals toward the increased volumes of documentation is understandable.
- There is lack of clarity on the function of the school parents' boards and public boards.
- It is not clear how the quality of education will be raised and which are the criteria of measure. .
- There is no information about the innovation models on which the schools work and how they will improve the motivation of students, teachers and parents.

The listed above is not exhaustive but here are some conclusions:

- There is a need to do the possible in order to attract for the cause of inclusive education journalists from different media.
- There is need to create opportunities for public discussions on topics related to educational models, on the reform in education and the opening of the educational institutions to the community.
- There is need of discussion about the right and possibilities that the school boards have.
- There is sense in the sharing of good practices and innovative models.”

***Ivaylo Kiskinov***, teacher and acting school principal of 202 elementary school “Hristo Botev“, Dolni Passarel, Sofia, President of the Professional community for inclusive education.

*Prof. Silvia Nikolaeva, PhD:*

„In Bulgaria not from recently the education is a field of innovative policies and practices. If the inclusive education in Bulgaria today is not only an idea or expectation, but also an objective reality, the contribution for this is to the objective circumstances and to the actual people and organizations that stay behind them. That is why I find it really natural when in Bulgaria we talk and analyze the area of inclusive education, this analysis to happen in parallel with the objective evaluation of the contribution of the Centre for inclusive education, thanks to which today we have the original, Bulgarian model for inclusive education in school. And when similar meta-analysis is initiated by the Centre itself, this is an

undisputable sign of serious organizational maturity, expertise and public responsibility which merit to be appreciated.

Several are the accents that impressed me in the analyzed media publications dedicated to inclusive education. First of all, this is its *rapidly increasing recognition and popularity among more and more specific publics and social actors*. Concurrently, more tangible becomes the key place and role of *the proactive* (preventive, anticipating, developing), instead of *the reactive* (post-crisis) *actions, measure and decisions*. Unfortunately, both are more “formalized”, *they follow the tempo and the directions of maturity mostly of the official institutions, sponsors and/or external supporters, rather than this of their more active, interested “grass roots” participants* – specialists, students, parents, community members. That is why the sustainable dialogue and partnership with them it is a condition for success. This often is difficult, sometimes even impossible, but always inevitable.”

**Prof. Silvia Nikolaeva, PhD**, professor in Pedagogy, department of Social work in Sofia University “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, Head of the Centre for studies and innovation in non-formal education.