# THE EDUCATION POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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## INTRODUCTION

The Second World War and its consequences persuaded European countries to seek a new settlement, which would secure peace and move beyond the classic league of independent states. Most European governments realized the necessity of establishing a closer European collaboration than had existed before the war. This understanding eventually led to the Treaty of Rome and to the formation of the EC. The Maastricht Treaty of the European Union was the next major step towards European integration, though the concepts of integration still differ widely within the Member States. There is no single all-embracing theory of European integration. Rather, there are several different theoretical approaches: functionalist, neo-functionalist, pluralist, and federalist (Anderson, 1994).

Functionalists believed that closer co-operation arised directly from the functional needs of contemporary society. Functionally specific international institutions, which escaped from the bonds of national frontiers, were thought to be capable of satisfying these needs more efficiently. Functionalists hoped that sucessful international institutions would gradually erode the loyalties of citizens towards national governments.

Neo-functionalists regard the intermediaries – governments, ministries, agencies, political parties, interest groups, etc. – as palying a crucial role in the integration process. According to this model, states continue to exist but the European level is viewed as a legitimate arena for action and decision.

The pluralist position considers the power to remain dispersed among the states, which, nevertheless, closely cooperate with each other. Federalists claim federation to be the end product of European integration.

Although some aspects of all of these theories are similar, there are also significant differences between the four approaches. The essential difference

lies between those who believe that there is an irresistible dynamic leading to a European union, and those who reject this assumption, believing that the European union, if it is ever achieved, will result from a series of steps in constitution building and, at some point, one big step into a federal union. In this sense, functionalism and neofunctionalism are both gradualist, or process theories, while federalists believe that a unified Europe should emerge as a result of political solutions.

The unification of Europe during the present period of time has achieved no final form. The Member States have not been absorbed into a new Eurofederation, nor have they become the vassals of supranational institutions. On the contrary, the structure and shape of Europe has become more indeterminate. It is more useful to think in terms of a continuum than of a sharp divide, between intergovernmental co-operation among sovereign states and subordination within a supranational political system. What is the place of the education policy in this continuum? Are there any coordinated actions implemented by the Member States of the EU in the field of education? What are the problems and limitations of the education policy? What are the practical implications for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which have already expressed their wish to join the EU in the future? What is the role of the education policy in strengthening security and mutual understanding between the peoples of Europe? These are the questions which we are going to explore within the scope of the present paper.

## *SECTION ONE.* A SHORT HISTORICAL SURVEY

In the early stages of European integration, an education policy had not been identified as a political area for joint actions of the Member States. The Treaty of Rome does not explicitly mention education. It is barely touched upon by the Treaty other than a reference to the reciprocal recognition by the Member States of diplomas, professional qualifications, and vocational training.

On 9 February 1976, the Council of the European Communities and the Ministers of Education meeting in Council adopted the action programme in the field of education. It was the first initiative of sizable political impact undertaken by the European Communities with regard to education. Three important themes of that programme were closer relations between the edu-

cation systems in Europe, co-operation in the field of higher education, and the development of foreign-language teaching.

In 1984 the Council expressed its commitment to ensure that children should be encouraged to acquire a basic working knowledge of two EC languages other than their own before they reach school-leaving age.

In December 1991, the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union finally laid the grounds for a legitimate role to be played by the EC Commission in the field of education.

In Chapter 3, Article 126 of the Treaty states:

"The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity."[1]

Six areas have been pointed out for the Community in the following order:

1) to develop the teaching of the languages of the Member States.

2) to encourage the mobility of students and teachers.

3) to promote cooperation between educational establishments.

4) to develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems.

5) to encourage the development of youth exchanges.

6) to encourage the development of distant education.

Article 127 defines the Community's vocational training policy. The Community's actions shall aim:

1) to facilitate the adaptation to industrial changes.

2) to improve initial and continuing vocational training.

3) to encourage the mobility of instructors and trainees.

4) to stimulate cooperation between training establishments and firms.

5) to develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems.

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[1] The text of the Treaty is taken from: CORBETT, R. (1993) **The Treaty of Maastricht,** p. 406.

## *SECTION TWO.* IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATION POLICY

### 2.1. Action programmes

The education policy of the European Union at present is mainly implemented through a series of programmes concerned with education and training. Most important of these are:

ARION. The programme promotes the mobility of education experts and persons in positions of responsibility in the field.

CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training). The programme, established in 1975, is aimed at encouraging, through research and promotional activity, the development of vocational and in-service training for adults. The programme is recently more focused upon the employment problems of women, especially those who wish to return to work after a long abscence.

COMETT (Community Programme for Education and Training in Technology). The programme, established in 1986, is to ensure that the European Communities will have a sufficient reservoir of skilled engineers and technicians capable of operating and utilizing the new techniques. It has the task of promoting cross-national co-operation between industrial companies and universities in the training of students in new technologies. The key component is that students should receive work experience during their studies by being given a job placement in a company in another Member State. Exchanges are organized and managed by UETPs (University – Enterprise Training Partnerships).

EUROTECNET. The programme, established in 1985, encourages innovation in initial and ongoing vocational training to take account of technological change. A network of pilot projects is encouraging the proliferation of innovative activities through the creation of cross-border partnerships. The programme also funds co-operation in the are of research and the dissemination of research findings.

EURYDICE (Education Information Network in the European Community). Established in 1980, the network information service is based upon data banks of educational statistics.

ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students). The main objective of the programme, established in

1987, is to encourage students to spend an integral part of their studies at a university in another Community country. The periods of study abroad are recognized by the students' home universities through the establishment of ECTS (European Community Course Credit Transfer System). ERASMUS also provides financial support to universities for Inter-University Cooperation Programmes (ICPs).

FORCE (Formation Continue En Europe) is the EC action programme for the development of continuing vocational training. It is focused on companies, especially small and medium-sized ones. FORCE promotes working partnerships in continual training between companies, training bodies, public authorities, and social partners.

HUMAN CAPITAL AND MOBILITY PROGRAMME. The programme aims at assisting in the creation of a European Scientific Community through the increase, in quality and quantity, of the human resources for research and development required by the Member States. It covers research in all the exact and natural sciences, and also the economic, social, and human sciences when related to European competitiveness.

JEAN MONNET ACTION. The aim of the programme, established in 1990, is to encourage Member State universities to set up courses which reflect the development of the European Community and to promote the growth of research and centres of excellence in fields relating to European integration. The programme partly funds teaching posts ("European Chairs"), supports the creation of permanent courses and "European" modules and research on European integration within the framework of the "Chairs."

LEONARDO. The Leonardo de Vinci programme, which started in 1995, is aimed at implementing a vocational training policy. The programme regroups and continues actions already undertaken within the COMETT, EUROTECNET, FORCE, PETRA, and LINGUA programmes, LEONARDO is open to participation by the associate countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

LINGUA is the name of a programme proposed by the Commission and adopted in 1989 as a means of supporting and developing the teaching of the languages of the Member States. It is a follow-up to the 1984 commitment to ensure that schoolchildren would acquire a working knowledge of two other EC languages by the time they reached the statutory school-leaving age. Ac-

tion II of LINGUA focuses on the learning of foreign languages in higher education. Action II encourages the mobility of students preparing to become foreing language teachers and students specialising in modern languages.

PETRA. The aim of the programme is to train and prepare young people for the world of work. It enables them to receive one or two years of vocational training over and above their compulsory schooling and, thus, a chance to obtain qualifications. The programme also provides easier initial training for the training and teaching staff of technical and vocational networks.

TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) is a part of the Community's overall programme of economic assistance to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – PHARE (Pologne et Hongrie Assistance pour la Restructuration Economique).[2] Within this framework, training and higher education have been identified as priority areas for cooperation. The aim of the TEMPUS Scheme, adopted in 1990, is to promote the quality and support the development of the higher education systems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe designated as eligible for economic aid, and to encourage their growing interaction with partners in the European Community through joint activities and relevant mobility. The main vehicle for cooperation consists of Joint European Projects (JEPs), involving the participation of at least one university from an eligible country and of partner organizations in at least two EC Member States.

Most of the programmes are proving to be sucessful. For example, during the academic year 94/95, about 116,000 students – 8,9% more than in 93/94 – took advantage of the ERASMUS programme to study in a European country other than their own. Nearly 10,000 teachers were able to teach in another European country. Thanks to Action II of the LINGUA programme, more than 10,000 students and 720 teachers were able to improve their linguistic performances in another European country during the year 94/95. The COMETT programme will enable some 7,800 technology students to train with a firm in another European country.

As from the 94/95 academic year, universities will have another 53 teaching posts devoted to European integration in the framework of the JEAN

[2] A similar TACIS programme has been established for the Commonwealth of Independent States.

MONNET ACTION. These chairs are in addition to those already instituted since 1990, and bring the total number of chairs to 190. European universities will also be able to ofter 93 new permanent and required courses on Europe, as well as 85 European teaching modules.

JEAN MONNET ACTION will also provide 5 research assistants linked to the European chairs. Nearly 400 institutions of higher education in all will have benefited from the JEAN MONNET ACTION since it was launched.[3]

### 2.2. European Schools

European Schools were established for the children of EC employees, in particular those working in a Member State other than their own. Being part of the Commission's education policy, Schools take a further step towards "European education." They do this by providing civic and academic education for "true" European citizens. The Schools offer an international syllabus in which academic tuition is given in several EC languages. The head teachers are appointed by an intergovernmental committee, and each national government appoints a proportion of the other teaching staff.

### 2.3. European University Institute

Amongst European actions in the field of education policy, one must include the Convention setting up the European University Institute in Florence. Founded in 1976, it is an establishment for research and training in postgraduate education. The research work has to cover the great movements and institutions which characterise the history and development of Europe. The Institute runs doctoral programmes in four faculties: economics, history and civilization, law and politics, and the social sciences. Entry for students is competitive. They are expected to have competence in more than one EC language. Staff appointments, made on the basis of open competition, are funded by the EC and are for fixed terms of between three and seven years.

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[3] All data for this paragraph is taken from: EUROPEAN COMMISSION (1994) **Frontier-Free Europe**, vol. 6, p. 2.

*SECTION THREE.*

**PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE EDUCATION POLICY**

Despite common understanding that education and training occupy a strategic position which is crucial to the Community's economic and social policies, working out a common education policy is still a difficult issue. The Community has accepted that national traditions and practices in education are too complex to be easily standardized. The foundations of a European identity might be laid in the schools: they could prepare young people for European citizenship by promoting common values which go beyond those born purely of national and regional characteristics. Nevertheless, many Member States fiercely depend their own turf when it comes to education, which is not within the Community's jurisdiction. School curricula still recount national histories and national geographies, and attempts to create a European core curriculum have run into resistance in a number of Member States. As a result, in order not to make this issue even more problematic, the education policy, based upon a programme adopted by the Council of Ministers, has taken the form of recommendations to Member States rather than binding legislation.

Even in relatively neutral fields of education, such as vocational training and the learning of foreign languages, disagreements between Member States sometimes create serious problems. For example, the EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION was established in order to improve initial and ongoing vocational training for young people, particularly retraining and training in administration. Although the Council Regulation to establish the Foundation was adopted in May 1990, its practical implementation was postponed, as the Member States could not agree upon where it would be located.

Another example is linked with the LINGUA programme. In 1989 LINGUA was opposed in the Council of Ministers by the United Kingdom on the legalistic grounds that it was not covered by the Treaty of Rome and that education policy was the province of the Member States. In adopting LINGUA by a qualified majority, the Council accepted that British schoolchildren would be excluded from the programme.

These and a number of other examples show that there is still a long way to go towards a global and all-embracing European education policy.

## *SECTION FOUR.* EDUCATION POLICY OF THE EU AND COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Before the dramatic changes of 1989 and 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe, the European Community showed relatively little interest in developing links of cooperation with these countries in the field of education. The fall of Communism created a new situation in this respect, as newly developing democracies started making increasing calls for the Community's assistance. As a response, the PHARE programme was established for Poland and Hungary, followed later by the other eligible countries, aimed at providing economic assistance to the region. In this frame, in 1990, the TEMPUS programme was proposed, enabling Central and Eastern European countries to benefit from inter-university cooperation and student mobility with the Community.

If we look at the countries' priorities, we will see that, with hardly any exception, management, business administration, and applied economics are the leading areas. On the other hand, the modernisation of the education system figures very low, if at all, on the list of priorities. This shows that the global renovation of the education system, although a theoretically accepted priority by all Central and Eastern European countries, seems, in practice, not to be the center of attention, as these countries are trying to resolve more immediate needs.

During the period of May 22–June 1, 1991, a mission was undertaken by the European Commission's Task Force on Human Resources to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The mission issued a report which highlighted the main problems to be resolved in education and training:

1) changes in the legal framework resulting in decentralisation at all levels of the education and training system.

2) putting in place a long-scale training programme for teachers at all levels, particularly in civic education and foreign languages.

3) a vast training programme for administrators for the sucessful implementation of the reforms.

4) the integration of a European dimension, in the transformation and redefinition of standards, training content, and qualifications, in order to bring them into line with European systems.

5) the integration, to differing degrees, of a continuing training component involving enterprises.

6) concern and willingness to exploit the opportunities and resources offered by open and distant learning.

7) considering the need for the integration of sizeable ethnic minorities in proposals for the reform of education and training.

It is interesting to note that, while Member States of the Community are fiercely defending their own right to establish a content and methods of national education, the Community is recommending quite a different approach to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, people in Central and Eastern Europe are starting to feel that the transfer of knowledge, experience, and paradigms, which takes place, on the whole, rather uncritically, threatens their cultural identity, whereas this cultural identity has already been seriously eroded by the Communist "a-cultural" ideology.

Another serious problem is the danger of a massive brain drain. That the risk is not imaginary is attested by the fact that, during recent years, 20% of Polish scientists have emigrated to the West.[4] Study abroad programmes and student exchange schemes are used, not only to broaden experience, but also as a first step to a more promising labour market. This, naturally, creates a certain resistance of national decision-making bodies to international exchange programmes. What are some recent developments? In April 1993 the Council adopted the second phase of the Trans-European Cooperation Scheme. The main objectives of TEMPUS II are:

1) issues of curriculum development and an overhaul in priority areas.

2) the reform of higher education structures and institutions and their management.

3) the development of skill-related training to address specific higher and advanced-level skill shortages during economic reform.

In December 1994 the Council decided to open the Community programmes LEONARDO and SOCRATES and the YOUTH FOR EUROPE programme to the associated countries. The Council stated that the TEMPUS

[4] Source: KALLEN, D. (1993) **Higher Education Policy,** vol. 6, no. 3, p. 26.

programme was equally important to support the restructuring of higher education and vocational training. It also pointed out that, furthermore, bilateral efforts to promote the exchange of university students and professors and the joint development of curricula could be intensified, as well as the creation of school partnerships and the promotion of European language learning.

Therefore we can conclude, that the EU educational policy, directed towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, remains unchanged. Of course, one should not underestimate the enormous positive impact of support received by these countries from the European Community, but, on the other hand, the introduction of the "European dimension" into national systems of education still remains a controversial issue. Which dimension in education is considered to be European, British, French, German, or, maybe, Scandinavian?[5] A European dimension in this field is not yet a reality. It should be created; the sooner, the better. Perhaps this could help Central and Eastern European countries avoid confusion and contraversion while accomplishing their national educational reforms.

Concerning the implementation of the programmes, it seems that the most fruitful ones are those that are truly two-sided. It is obvious that many programmes have been introduced by Western institutions without sufficient imput from the "receiving side." Western colleagues should be encouraged to view their counterparts as equal partners, to show more trust and to involve them more actively in the decision-making process.

### *SECTION FIVE.* THE EDUCATION POLICY AS A MEANS OF STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Wistrich (1989) claims that the principal role of the Community's education policy is to promote better mutual understanding and the growth of a European consciousness. We think that most of the people working in the field of education would support this opinion. One of the ways of acquiring better mutual understanding is to learn other peoples' languages and, thus, to get to know one's neighbours. The understanding of the necessity of lear-

[5] The question is still widely discussed in the Lithuanian educational community.

ning foreign languages is constantly growing among young Europeans. In 1987, 47% of young people felt that it was necessary to speak foreign languages. In 1990, 61% felt that it was very important, and only 3% considered it to be unimportant.[6] The LINGUA programme is specifically aimed at improving the quantity and quality of language training. Beyond the knowledge of foreign languages, a most important contribution to the mutual understanding and the building of a common European consciousness lies in the teaching of European history. In most of the countries, the history taught in schools still has "a hoary accumulation of subjective national bias, often hostile to its neighbours, that should now be weeded out" (Wistrich, 1989, p. 85).

National history ought to be redesigned in order to ensure that it is taught within the context of its wider European and world framework. Improving education at schools is not enough. In order to reduce the ignorance of each other's countries, languages, and cultures, and to get to know one's neighbours better, it is necessary to visit one another. An intensive programme of youth exchanges between France and Germany could be one illustration. Millions of French and German young people have participated in programmes aimed at removing the traditional rivalry and hostility that have characterized their countries' relations over the centuries. This has resulted in a dissapearance of hostility and suspicion amongst the younger generations, that nevertheless can still be found amongst those who, as adults, lived through the last war. As a continuation of Franko-German experience, a programme, called YES (Youth Exchange Scheme) was launched in 1988.

Similar examples could be drawn from the implementation of student exchange programmes, e.g. ERASMUS. Keohane and Hoffman (1991) pointed out, that "enrollment of hundreds of Irish students in Northern Irish universities is but one striking instance of the way Community programs can help to heal old wounds" (p. 170).

Contacts and solidarity between young people across Europe could be an important element in combating the feelings of extreme nationalism and violence that have arisen as a result of immigration flows. On its meeting on December 9 and 10, 1994, the European Council emphasized the great importance of the Union-wide fight against racism and xenophobia for the pre-

[6] Source: COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (1993) **Youth Exchanges in the European Community,** p. 3.

servation of human dignity and peaceful co-existence of all citizens of the European Union. The Council urged for the starting of a discussion of possible ways of using education and training in order to deal with this problem.

Though it is generally acknowledged that education plays an important role in strengthening security and mutual understanding, the direct link here is rather intangible. Quite often, it is difficult to demonstrate the specific impact of education while dealing with the problems mentioned above, as the influence of education cons, ists more of a general nature. Thus the question of formulating a more security-oriented education policy in the EU is still left open to discussion.

## CONCLUSION

An education policy was not on the agenda during the early stages of European integration. The first initiative in this field was undertaken by the Council of the European Communities in 1976. The Treaty of Maastricht in 1991 finally defined the main trends of the education policy of the EU. Despite common understanding that education and training occupy a strategic position, which is crucial to the Community's economic and social policies, harmonization of legal rules in the Treaty is deemphasized, leaving the content of teaching and the organization of education systems in the full responsibility of the Member States. In the context of integration theories, this means that the education policy is essentially pluralistic-oriented, whereas the economic policy is clearly aimed towards creating an amalgamated community. The discrepancy in this respect is evident. We think that it could emerge as a manifestation of mutual respect of the cultural heritage of the Member States and an acknowledgement of maturity of civil societies in these countries.

The pluralsitic approach inevitably imposes certain limitations, sometimes rather substantial ones, as decisions of the EU concerning the education policy are taking the form of recommendations, rather than binding legislation. At present the education policy of the EU is implemented mostly through a series of action programmes, mainly in the fields of higher education, vocational training, and the teaching of languages and youth exchanges.

On the other hand, changes in legal framework, training content, and curriculum development are put in the front line while dealing with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This paradox might have emerged as a

consequence of the belief that societies of the countries in transition are not mature enough and should not be treated the same way as stable civil societies of the Member States. As a result, people in Central and Eastern Europe are starting to feel that a hasty and rather uncritical transfer of knowledge and values from the Western societies is threatening their cultural identity. The idea of introducing a "European dimension" into the educational structures of Central and eastern European countries is also rather confusing, as a European dimension in this field has yet to be created. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the substantial positive impact of the programmes providing assistance to newly developing democracies, which were established by the Community after the fall of the Communist regimes in 1989 and 1990.

The importance of education in strengthening security and mutual understanding is widely acknowledged. The teaching of history within a wider European context, the learning of foreign languages, youth exchanges, and civic and peace education could be pointed out as essential elements of this process. It is often difficult, however, to demonstrate the direct influence of education on the processes of strengthening security and mutual understanding, as the impact of education on young people consists of a more general nature. This leaves open to discussion the question of designing a more security-oriented education policy.

**EUROPOS SĄJUNGOS ŠVIETIMO POLITIKA**

**R. Želvys**

**Reziumė**

Pradinėje Europos integracijos stadijoje apie bendrą švietimo politiką nebuvo kalbama. Pirmosios iniciatyvos švietimo politikai koordinuoti atsirado 1976 metais. 1991 metais Mastrichto sutartis galutinai suformulavo Europos Sąjungos švietimo politikos principus. Europos Sąjunga nereglamentuoja į ją įeinančių šalių ugdymo turinio ir švietimo organizavimo principų. Bendra politika įgyvendinama tik per įvairias švietimui skirtas tarptautines programas. Pastaruoju metu į šias programas įsitraukia ir Rytų bei Vidurio Europos šalys. Šioms šalims keliami tam tikri reikalavimai, rekomenduojantys pertvarkyti savo ugdymo programas, mokytojų rengimą bei švietimo juridinę bazę. Toks „dvejopų standartų" taikymas kelia tam tikrų abejonių. Juk Rytų bei Vidurio Europos šalys turi tokias pat gilias, šimtmečius besitęsiančias švietimo tradicijas, kaip ir dabartinės Europos Sąjungos narės. Antra vertus, bendros programos gali padėti paspartinti švietimo reformas Rytų bei Vidurio Europoje.

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