



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Education and Culture
Education
Development of education policies

EDUCATION POLICIES AND EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

Contribution to the Interservice Groups on European Governance

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DG EAC/A/1

(Development of Educational Policies)

March 2001

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INTRODUCTION

The Treaty tells us that in the field of education:

*“The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action”.*¹

The Treaty furthermore stipulates, that when taking actions and initiatives in the field of education, the community should :

*“...fully respect(ing) the responsibilities of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of educational systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity”.*²

The actions of the Community in the field of education should according to the Treaty aim at:³

- developing the European dimension in education
- encouraging the mobility of students and teachers
- promoting co-operation between educational establishments
- exchange of information and experiences
- encouraging the development of distance education

Furthermore, the Community *“shall foster co-operation with third countries...in the field of education”*⁴

Education is an ideal-type of a policy area for subsidiarity to play its full role. The most optimal level of decision making in the field of education is at the National and/or the sub-national level, where initiatives can be taken that are fully integrated while the nationally-specific institutional set-ups as well as the historical and cultural heritage are respected. The quality of education in the Member States, and in the European Community as a whole, depends on the full respect of these principles. Article 149 of the Treaty is firmly founded on these principles.

After the first reading of the Treaty, one could be liable to misunderstand what is presently happening within the field of education on a Community level. Community

¹ Treaty, Art. 149.1 (Chapter 3 : Education, vocational training and Youth)

² idem.

³ Treaty, Art 149.2

⁴ Treaty, Art 149.3

actions could be limited to the implementation of action programmes such as the Socrates programme. This latter programme is indeed a major tool for promoting a European dimension of education. Within the period 1995-2000 almost 1.000.000 Europeans have participated in the Education, Training and Youth Community action programmes (Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Youth for Europe). These programmes represent therefore Community initiatives as “near to the people of Europe” as one can come ! With the new generation of programmes, the participation is even rapidly growing. Presently more than 200.000 students participate yearly in mobility schemes (Erasmus) which only one part of the Socrates programme representing about 50% of the total budget (+/- 220 million Euro p.a.). Other parts cover school education (Comenius) adult education and “other educational strand (Grundtvig), language teaching (Lingua) and ICT (Minerva).

Co-operation between Member States in education is however clearly not limited to the implementation of Community action programmes. There is a manifest will and political demand to go beyond presented by the Member States and reinforced by the European Parliament, the Social and Economic Committee as well as by the Committee of regions.

What is presently happening in co-operation in the field of education tells us, that not only is a ***European Space of Education*** in its making, common principles of education are being agreed upon between Member States, leading logically to a ***European Model of Education***. Furthermore, this momentum of deepening co-operation in education is followed by a strong movement toward enlargement. Thirty European countries participate presently in the action programme Socrates and 35 European countries are actively participating in co-operation concerning the development of quality of education and training. At a yearly meeting of Ministers of education of 35+ European countries the foundations of a ***European House of education*** are being laid.

The momentum of co-operation and integration in the field of education is presently accelerating to such a degree that the central role of the Commission - to be the guardian of the Treaty and to play its full role related to the right of taking initiatives - is being challenged. A great multitude of political initiatives have been taken. Community initiatives, inter-governmental Europe-wide initiatives, multi-lateral initiatives, bi-lateral initiatives and even national initiatives are taken that are all directed towards one single vision: European co-operation in the field of education. Co-operation in education is therefore an extremely pertinent example for any analysis on Governance and the role of the European institutions in general, and the role of the Commission in particular.

The reader will below find a short, but hopefully sufficient, overview of recent developments in co-operation in the field of educational policies as an introduction to understanding possible trends of Governance and European Educational policy co-operation.

I CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to understand what is presently happening in the field of co-operation in education on a European level, a minimum of reference to the historical development is necessary.

Four historical periods of European co-operation in the field of education can be identified.

- 1971 – 1992 Building up European Co-operation based on Community action programmes
- 1993 – 1996 Identifying challenges and ways forward
- 1997 – 1999 Mainstreaming Education in Community Policies
- 2000 – Building a European Area of Education Based Common Objectives for National Educational Systems.

These four periods are accumulating and complementing the stock of Community actions and political initiatives in the field. Very few, if any, initiatives taken throughout the last 25 years have proven to be unfruitful and have been abandoned.

1. 1971 – 1992 Building up European Co-operation based on Community action programmes

This is the first period where the Member States gradually agreed on launching major community action programmes in education.

In 1971, the six Ministers of education met for the first time. Subsequently the Commission set up two working groups, in order to reflect on a possible future co-operation in the field of education. The result of their work were presented in the so-called “Janne report”, named after the chairman of one of the groups, the Belgian Minister of Education, Mr Hanri Janne. This announced the start of European co-operation in education. Already almost ten years earlier (1963) Ministers responsible for training policies had met on a European level.

The Education Committee was created by the ministers of education “réunis en Conseil” June 6, 1974, almost 15 years after the Treaty of Rome went into force (where no reference to education is made).

In 1976, Ministers of education adopted a first Resolution on co-operation in Education announcing an “action programme” which included mainly, studies, research, visits, compilation of up-to-date documentation and statistics in a number of educational fields.⁵ The first steps towards the setting up of what later became the Eurydice action in the field of documentation and statistics, and the Arion action in the field of educational decision makers' visits, were made together with the first steps towards the Lingua programme (languages) and the Erasmus programme (higher education).

In order to avoid a lengthy description of a very long process of co-operation-building in the field of education, the results of this success story were two: The decision in 1995 of

⁵ Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of education meeting within the Council comprising an action programme in the field of Education. O.J. No C 38, 19.02.1976, p.1)

the first Socrates programme ⁶ - made possible due to the introduction of Education in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), Article 126, - and the more recent decision, in the year 2000 of the second phase of the Socrates programme running up to 2006 ⁷.

The negotiations and mutual trust-building process (between the member States, as well as between the member States and the Commission) during this first phase of co-operation, 1974-1992, made this development possible. The permanent strong support of the European Parliament for the setting up of significant actions and programmes has been primordial.

In this long process of trust-building the increasing knowledge on national educational systems have played a central role. The Eurydice collection and analysis of data and information, in close co-operation with Eurostat, has been primordial.⁸ Presently 30 European countries participate in this action.

2. 1993 – 1996 Identifying challenges and ways forward

Already with the ratification of the Single European Act (1987) were the central importance of human resources introduced in the treaty and social cohesion became a central policy objective.

One cannot however, not understand the role of education and Community policies without first of all referring to the White Paper on “Growth, Competitiveness, Employment” – the “Jacques Delors White Paper”⁹ – which was published in 1993/94 after in-depth consultation with the Member States, and a very dense co-operation between all the services of the Commission. This White Paper which might be the most influential general policy document ever made by the Commission, presented several very novel messages, all with strong reference to the role of education and training for Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment. The White Paper announced not only the urgent need for an “adaptation of the education and vocational training systems” (Chapter 7) in order to answer the societal challenges of the Community, but also situated education and training in the centre of a “new mode of development” (Chapter 10).

The concrete challenges of education were discussed and defined further in another White Paper under the Title of : “Teaching and Learning – Towards the learning Society” which was published during the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 by the joint

⁶ Decision of the European parliament and of the Council establishing the Community action programme Socrates (O.J. L 87 20 April 1995)

⁷ Decision of the European parliament and of the Council establishing the second phase of the community action programme in the field of education “Socrates” (O.J. L 28 , 3.02.2000)

⁸ See Eurydice “Eurydice, the Information Network on Education in Europe – 20 years Promoting better Understanding of Systems of Education” Bruxelles, 2000. See <http://www.eurydice.org/>

⁹ European Commission White Paper “Growth, Competitiveness, Employment”, Luxembourg 1994.

initiatives of Commissioners responsible for Education and Employment ¹⁰. The overall message of the White paper was made under the heading of five objectives:

- Objective 1. Encourage the acquisition of new knowledge (recognition of skills, mobility, multimedia educational software)
- Objective 2. Bringing schools and business sectors closer together (apprenticeship/training schemes, vocational training)
- Objective 3. Combat exclusion (Second chance schools, European voluntary services)
- Objective 4. Proficiency in three community languages
- Objective 5. Treat capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis

The success of the pilot projects initiated, mainly those concerning recognition (Objective 1) second chance schools pilot project and the European voluntary services (Objective 3)¹¹ and languages (objective 4), prepared the ground for defining not only the content of the second phase of the Socrates programme, but also for mainstreaming education in other community policy fields (social cohesion, employment).

3. 1997 – 1999 Mainstreaming Education in Community Policies

During this relatively short period, major advancements were made in order for education and training to play its full and central role in policies of especially social cohesion and employment.

The “Luxembourg process” was launched by the Luxembourg Job Summit in November 1997. The European Employment Strategy was built on four main pillars: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities, and it fully included the education and training dimension from the very start. To illustrate this, one can refer to the Guidelines for employment policies, adopted most recently, where “developing skills for the new labour market in the context of lifelong learning” is one of the main headings, with the following detailed guidelines for education policies (extract):

“4. Member States will therefore improve the quality of their education and training system...in order to: ...

- Eradicate illiteracy and reduce substantially the number of young people who drop out of the school system early...develop measures aimed

¹⁰ European Commission White Paper “Teaching and learning – towards the learning society”, Luxembourg, 1996. Further analysis were made by the Study Group on Education and Training in the Report “Accomplishing Europe through education and training”, Luxembourg, 1997.

¹¹ See <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/2chance/homeen.html>. See also: European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, “Integrating all Young People into Society through Education and Training (2 vol.), Brussels, 2001; Institut de la Méditerranée “L’Ecole de la deuxième chance”, Marseille, 1997

at halving by 2010 the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary education who are not in further education and training. ...

- Ensure that education systems deliver a continuously updated package of core skills”¹²

Education and training is presently playing its full role in the Guidelines. Whether education and training fully play their role in the Member states' National Action Plans, can still be questioned, although we have witnessed a clear positive development within the last years. The Working document on “Education and Training in Employment Policies”, which DG Education and Culture has published yearly since 1998, have been an important contribution for alerting Member States, and especially the Ministers of Education, as to the importance of placing education in the centre of national employment policies¹³ Furthermore the recent “Memorandum on Lifelong learning” that presently is being discussed throughout the Union in a large number of National debates will provide the common ground for understanding and implementing Lifelong learning which is a strategic horizontal objective in the Employment Guidelines.¹⁴

By the adoption of the new regulations for the Social Fund, a new Objective 3 outlines the role played by the Fund in complementing the Member States' activities towards the development of the labour market and human resources in the policy field of education and training (in particular in the context of their multi-annual action plans for employment). Objective 3 thus includes actions for:

“Promoting and improving training, education, counselling as part of lifelong learning policies to: - facilitate and improve access to and integration into, - the labour market, - improve and maintain employability and promote job mobility”¹⁵

The process of mainstreaming educational policies has recently taken a very important step forward by adopting of the Social Agenda¹⁶ which will equally be implemented through national action plans. The role of education and training in these Social Agenda NAP's will be central to their success and will demand a close co-operation between the social and educational policy fields.

¹² Council Decision on Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies for the Year 2001 OJ L22/18 of 24.01.2001.

¹³ Document de travail des services de la Commission “Rapport européen sur l'éducation et la formation dans les politiques de l'emploi” Vol 1 “Analyse des Plans d'actions nationaux pour l'emploi 2000”, Vol 2 “Analyse par Etats membres des plans d'action nationaux pour l'emploi 2000”, Janvier 2001

¹⁴ Working Document from the Services of the Commission “Memorandum on Lifelong Learning”, October 2000.

¹⁵ Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund (O.J. L 213, 12.07.1999, p.5)

¹⁶ See Annexe 1 to the presidency conclusion of the European Council in Nice (7-9 December 2000)

4. 2000 – Building a European Area of Education Based on Common Objectives for National Educational Systems.

During the beginning of this period, the efficiency and the longer term perspectives of the Education Council and its Education Committee's work were questioned in light of the increasing importance of education in Community policy making. The longer and medium term perspectives of educational co-operation clearly demanded innovation in the functioning of the European institutions. The basis for the reform of the decision making processes of the Education Council was laid out by the end of 1999, with the adoption of a Rolling Agenda of the Council.

The work of the Education Council has been heavily marked by the agendas of changing Presidencies since its very beginning. Based on the experiences made in employment policies, but also in other fields of co-operation such as “improving quality of education” and “promoting mobility”, the Commission invited the Member States to reflect together with the Commission in order to identify means and ways for ensuring a greater continuity in the work of the Council. After in-depth discussions in the Education Committee, Ministers agreed, at the informal meeting of the Education Council in Tampere in September 1999, under the Finish Presidency, to base the future Education Council's work programme on a Rolling Agenda¹⁷. Under this structure, a limited number of priority themes would be considered on a cyclical basis. Individual presidencies would have an important role to play in ensuring the continuity and momentum of the process. The Council resolution on the Rolling Agenda, ‘Developing new working procedures for European co-operation in the field of education and training’, was formally adopted at the Education Council meeting on 26 November 1999.

As well as creating greater continuity, the implementation of a Rolling Agenda would enable a more effective exchange of information, experience and good practice between Member States.

The Resolution adopted by the Education Council presents the following procedures of co-operation.

- Education Council discusses priority themes of common interest and agrees, if appropriate, on how to take them forward;
- Member States are invited to inform the Commission of relevant political initiatives and examples of best practice at national level in relation to the agreed themes;
- Commission provides a summary analysis of the information supplied by Member States to the Education Council. This should also cover Community action;
- Education Council considers the Commission's analysis and, where appropriate, decides on future initiatives.

¹⁷ Council Resolution on ‘Into the new millennium: developing new working procedures for European co-operation in the field of education and training’ (2000/C 8/04) adopted by the Education Council at its meeting of 26 November 1999.

The steps set out, were however not intended to be prescriptive. The Council resolution stresses that flexibility is needed in the way the Rolling Agenda is operated, allowing it to adapt to new political priorities and initiatives as appropriate. Different approaches may be required in different circumstances.

Within the overall context of lifelong learning, the Resolution presents furthermore three priority themes for future work:

- The role of education and training in employment policies
- The development of quality education and training at all levels
- The promotion of mobility, including recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

Th reader would not be able to understand the most recent development in European co-operation in the field of education from the point of view of European Governance, unless a we by one example show the complexity that marks the co-operation within the last years. The “development of quality education and training at all levels” is a good example of such complexity.¹⁸

II “QUALITY OF EDUCATION” – A CASE ON THE COMPLEXITY OF GOUVERNANCE

The quality of education is considered in all Member States to be a concern of the highest political priority as it is also clearly stated in the Treaty, Article 149 (see above).

Quality of education is not only debated amongst ministers at formal and in-formal Council meetings, but ministers of education meet frequently throughout the year and quality of education is almost always on the agenda. The Education Council has debated the subject of quality on numerous occasions and a number of Conclusions and Resolutions have been adopted, inviting Member States and the Commission to initiate co-operation in the field.¹⁹ However, initiatives have been taken within the last 5-6 years by individual persons, many institutions and in numerous different forms.

¹⁸ One could of course have chosen the theme of “mobility” where recently a great complexity of modes of co-operation has emerged with the negotiation on the Commission Proposal for a recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament aiming to encourage mobility in the EC of students, those undergoing training,, young volunteers, teachers and trainers (COM (1999) 708 final of 21 January 2000) and the “Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, concerning an action plan for mobility” and adopted 9 November 2000, by the Education/Youth Council.

¹⁹ Council resolution of 5 December 1994 on quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (OJ No C 374, 30.12.1994). Council Conclusion on the importance and implications of the quality of vocational training (OJ No C 207, 12.08.1995) Council Conclusion of 20 December 1996 on school effectiveness: principles and strategies to promote success at school (OJ No C 7, 10.01.1997) Council Conclusions of 16 December 1997 on the evaluation of quality in school education (OJ No C 1, 3.01.1998) Council recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European Co-operation in quality assurance in higher education (OJ No L 561, 7.10.1998).

1. The Spanish Presidency and the French Presidency took an initiative (1995)

Senior education officials met twice in 1995 to discuss the quality of education in schools. At both meetings considered the question of evaluation and stressed the richness and diversity of the approaches used in the Member States. The meeting convened by the French Presidency in June 1995 considered the evaluation of pupil achievement, whereas the meeting convened by the Spanish Presidency in November 1995 looked at external evaluation and self-appraisal in schools, with particular emphasis on the integration of schools in their environment as a criterion of quality. The latter meeting therefore highlighted especially the involvement of stakeholders in order to ensure the improvement of quality of education. The Commission was invited to look into the general question of quality of school education.

2. The Commission presented two proposals for a Recommendation in (1996) and in(1998)

A Recommendation on 'European Co-operation in quality assurance in higher education' was adopted in 1998²⁰. This first recommendation in the field of quality evaluation recommend that the Member States support (or where necessary) establish transparent quality assurance systems; based quality assurance systems on a number of features (autonomy of the bodies responsible for evaluation; combined use of internal and external evaluation etc.); and promote exchange of experiences. Following this first recommendation, the Commission presented a second Recommendation, this time in the field of quality evaluation of School education which will be formally adopted February/March 2001 after having conducted a pilot project (1997-1998) involving 101 secondary school throughout the Union.²¹

The strong momentum of European co-operation in Education within the last 2 to 3 years and the willingness and demand of the Member States to strengthen their co-operation in the field of quality evaluation, has marked the negotiation on the proposals presented by the Commission. Whereas the negotiation on the Recommendation on quality evaluation in Higher Education was extremely laborious (1996-1998), the negotiation on the recommendation on quality evaluation in School Education has been made in an atmosphere of strong support (1998-2001). Both the Education Committee and especially the European Parliament have strengthened even further the initial proposal on quality evaluation in School education of the Commission.²²

3. Ministers of Education met in Paris (1998) and in Bologna (1999).

²⁰ Proposal for a Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament on European co-operation in Quality Evaluation in School Education” 98/461/EC.

²¹ See John Macbeath, Michael Schwartz, Denis Meuret, Lars Jakobsen “Self-Evaluation in European Schools – A Story of Change” Routledge, London, 2000.

²² After these two Recommendation on Quality evaluation in the fields of higher education and School education, the Commission prepares presently a Proposal for a Recommendation in the field of quality evaluation in Vocational Training. The proposal is foreseen to be presented end 2001/begin 2002.

The promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education was one of the objectives agreed upon by Ministers of education at the conference held in Bologna on 19 June 1999, as a follow-up to the Sorbonne Declaration of 25 May 1998²³. The Declaration was finally signed by 28 European countries and includes a series of common goals for the development of higher education. The initial Declaration signed by four Ministers of Education in Paris included explicit references to need for “harmonisation” in higher education in Europe. The final Declaration modifies the concept and sets as overall objective is to create a “European space for higher education” to be completed in 2010. The more specific goals defined in the declaration include:

- the adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees;
- the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years and relevant to the labour market;
- a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods;
- the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students (as well as trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators).

Many of these actions are in conformity with Community initiatives carried out within the frame of the Socrates programme (Erasmus). As concerns the elimination of obstacles to mobility, the Commission has proposed a Recommendation²⁴ which the Council and the European Parliament are presently negotiating, and a Plan of Action for Mobility was adopted during the French Presidency.

4. Ministers of Education met in Florence (1999)

In September 1999 Ministers of Education were invited to a meeting in Florence with a view to signing a declaration in the field of School Education²⁵ on the invitation of the Italian Minister of education. The Florence Declaration “Learning in Europe” presents a series of common agreements of the quality and development of school education. The eight signatories (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Tcheque Republic and Romania) to this declaration recognised the importance of attaining common goals and of creating a European Area of enhanced co-operation in Basic Education. They agreed among other items on the need to: define and implement standards of knowledge and competence to be attained at completion of primary and compulsory schooling; to develop systems for evaluating pupil performance; to develop systems for evaluating schools’ performance.

²³ The Bologna Declaration “The European Higher Education Area – Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education Convened in Bologna on 19 June 1999”.

²⁴ Proposal for recommendation aiming to encourage mobility in the EC of students, those undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers (COM (1999) 708 final of 21 January 2000).

²⁵ The Florence Declaration “Learning in Europe – Working Together to Face Common Challenges” signed in Florence on 30 September 1999.

The Florence declaration has been followed-up through co-operation between the eight countries in a number of fields mentioned in the Declaration. One central subject matter is the question of basic competencies or “standards of knowledge and competence to be attained at completion of primary and compulsory schooling” as stated in the Declaration. The reference to a “Framework of basic skills” as it is made in the “Lisbon conclusions” is clearly inspired by the follow-up of the Florence declaration, where Portugal is actively involved.

5. Ministers of Education met in Prague (1998) and in Bucharest (2000)

Education Ministers of the European Union and of the eleven accessing countries, as well as the Education Ministers from the three non-associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe who participated as observers, all met in Prague in June 1998. The Education Ministers from the participating countries invited the Commission to establish a Working Committee of national experts designated by the Ministers with a view to agreeing on a limited number of indicators or benchmarks for school standards to assist national evaluation of systems. A working group consisting of experts of 26 European countries was subsequently set up in February 1999.

The objective here was not to define a common concept of quality of education, but to identify areas (supported by indicators) within which comparisons between countries can be made in order to identify good practice, exchange experience and define main policy challenges. The overall aim is therefore to identify an agenda for comparisons, exchange of experiences and for debates between Education Ministers in the Council. A first “European Report on Quality of School Education” was presented in May 2000.²⁶

In the conclusions of the meeting of Ministers of education in Bucharest (June, 2000) the Commission was invited to continue its work with experts designated by the 35 participating Ministers in order to this time identify a limited number of indicators for quality of lifelong learning.

6. Diverse initiatives but all directed towards the same long term objectives

Not many European policy fields, if any, have been experienced in such a short period of time such diverse initiatives taken on so many levels:

- The initiatives of individual Presidencies (the Spanish and the French) inviting the Commission to start initiatives in the field of quality of school education;
- the Commission initiatives taken by the presentation of two Recommendations (the “strongest” legal tool that can be used in the field of education);
- the initiatives taken by one country (France) to invite three big Member states (Germany, the UK and Italy) to sign a declaration on higher education;
- the initiative of another Member State (Italy) to invite the Member States to sign another Declaration on School Education;

²⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture “European Report on Quality of School Education – Sixteen Quality Indicators”, Luxembourg, 2001.

- the initiative of 35 European countries to invite the Commission to carry out work on indicators for quality of education.

All, initiatives seem to have been taken with one single objective: to use the European dimension and European co-operation in view of improving quality of education in the Member States. The Treaty provides room for a wide range of initiatives that “*contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action*”²⁷ – nevertheless the overview of initiatives taken in the field of quality of education show that Member States – but also the Commission – are still searching for the right mode of co-operation .

Indeed, a complex political framework for the Commission’s use of it’s right of initiative.

III COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND THE OPEN METHOD OF CO-ORDINATION - TOWARDS THE “EUROPEAN SPACE OF EDUCATION”.

The development described above illustrates how European educational policy co-operation has developed during the last 25 years. Much of the development has been based on a gradual trust-building between Member States and Member States and the Commission, but also supported by the general development of European integration and the internationalisation/”Europenisation” of the economy and labour market. One could possibly explain the development up until 1999 on the basis of such an argumentation.

However, it is difficult to understand the developments over the last two to three years based on that reasoning only. The White Paper of Jacques Delors (1993/94) changed policy making of the Commission and put human resource development fully on the agenda. However it did not immediately change European co-operation in educational policies.

The first steps toward an accelerating momentum of educational policy co-operation probably took its start with the agreement of the Ministers of education on a Rolling Agenda in Tampere under the Finish presidency. It is the “Rolling Agenda” that announces the will og member States of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of European Educational policy making - however without any overall agreement on what direction education in Europe would take.

1. Lisbon Conclusions and The Open Method of Co-ordination

The Lisbon conclusions are the second example of a genuinely historical text on general policy orientation - the first mentioned being the “Delors White paper”. Education policies are here again at the centre of attention of two central messages by way of: an introduction in the conclusions of specific educational benchmarks and guidelines, and the invitation to Ministers of Education to reflect on Common objectives for educational systems in Europe.

²⁷ Treaty, Art. 149.1

The benchmarks and guidelines on education and training are central in the Lisbon conclusions. In no other policy fields are the conclusions as explicit. The Heads of State identified clear aims and guidelines for national educational systems in the conclusions (par. 26). The three most central for education are :

- a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resources;
- the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010;
- a European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills;

However, the Lisbon conclusions become of paramount importance for education in Europe due to the invitation of the Education Council made in Par 27.

“27. The European Council asks the Council (Education) to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity, with a view to contributing to the Luxembourg and Cardiff processes and presenting a broader report to the European Council in the Spring of 2001.” (authors underlining)

As mentioned above, the Rolling Agenda adopted in Tampere in 2000, did provide for procedures of co-operation and priority themes, but did not specify the general objectives of this co-operation. The Lisbon conclusions provide a contribution to a clarification. The Conclusions announce the new strategic objective for the European Union: “*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the World*”²⁸ and the central role education and training plays in making real the objective within the next ten years. When Heads of State therefore invite the Ministers of Education “to reflect on the concrete future objectives of education systems” and to concentrate on “common concerns and priorities”, they invite the Ministers to reflect on how education and training can fulfil its role in the new European strategic objective. What common concerns and priorities on a European level will enable the educational system in Europe to fulfil its role in the new knowledge society ?

It should be mentioned that the question itself is revolutionary. Since the very beginning of European co-operation in the field of education, Ministers of Education have underlined the diversity of their systems of education. The very reason why they met was in fact that their systems were diverse. Any mentioning of “common denominators” was considered of lesser importance and mainly used in National debates. The Lisbon conclusions break with this by asking the Ministers to concentrate their reflection on what is common.

The Commission prepared a first outline of possible general objectives of education systems based on national contributions which were discussed by the Ministers at their meeting November 8, 2000. The Ministers invited the Commission on that basis to

²⁸ Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Lisbon, 23 – 24 March 2000, par. 5

prepare a proposal for a Report²⁹ that after adoption in the Education Council February 12, 2001, would be transmitted to the Stockholm Summit.

The Ministers of education agreed on three overall objectives of the educational systems in Europe based on a proposal from the Commission:

Objective 1: Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU

Objective 2: Facilitating the access to all education and training systems

Objective 3: Opening up Education and Training systems to the World

Within these three main objectives some 20 sub-objectives are presented in the report (see below).

After the adoption by the Education Council, the report will be transmitted to the European Council in Stockholm, after which detailed negotiations will be carried out in order to identify the “open method of co-ordination” to be applied in the implementation process that is planned to last throughout the coming ten years.

With experiences from the negotiations on the Rolling Agenda, the conclusions of the Lisbon Summit were prepared well in the Education Council in terms of co-operation procedures³⁰. The open method of co-ordination covers procedural steps of co-operation which are in fact very similar to what was the case in the Rolling Agenda. The main, but also very essential difference, is the mention of “guidelines”.

THE CONCRETE FUTURE OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

Adopted by the Education Council, February 12, 2001, and transmitted to the Stockholm Summit

Objective 1: Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and Training systems in the EU

- Improving education and training for teachers and trainers.
- Developing skills for the knowledge society:
 - Increasing literacy and numeracy;
 - Updating the definition of skills for the knowledge society;
 - Maintaining the ability to learn;
- Ensuring access to ICTs for everyone:

²⁹ Report from the Commission “The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems” COM(2001) 59 final, 31.01.2001

³⁰ Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Lisbon, 23 – 24 March 2000

- Equipping schools and learning centres;
 - Involving teachers and trainers;
 - using networks and resources.
- Increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies.
 - Making the best use of resources.
 - Improving the quality assurance;
 - Ensuring efficient use of resources;

Objective 2: Facilitating the access to all education and training systems

- Open learning environment
- Making learning attractive
- Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

Objective 3: Opening up Education and Training systems to the World

- Strengthening links with working life and research and society at large
- Developing the spirit of enterprise
- Improving foreign language learning
- Increasing mobility and exchanges
- Strengthening European co-operation

The Open method of co-ordination can, on that basis, find its implementation in the field of education. However, adaptations might be made so that co-operation in education according to the principles set out in Article 149 of the Treaty is fully respected.

2. **Four Tentative Explanations of the Present Momentum of European Co-operation in Education.**

We have presented above a short overview of more than 25 years of European co-operation in education and shown how the momentum of co-operation has accelerated with the last 2-3 years. Furthermore, by reference to co-operation in the specific field of quality of education, we have shown the complexity of modes of co-operation that has emerged.

Education is, according to the Treaty, the full responsibility of Member States. Nevertheless, within the last years, Member States themselves seem to have initiated a still more dense co-operation which until now has resulted in the agreement on a number of common objectives for the education systems in Europe. Why this development ?

One could tentatively mention four explanations for this development: Historical evolution; Internationalisation of education; Preparing for Enlargement; and Politicisation” of initiatives.

Historical evolution. The very history of co-operation in education in Europe gives some hints toward an explanation. In fact, as seen above, throughout the last 25 years, co-operation has been ever more deepened. After the first long period of trust-building and the adoption of still larger action programmes, the Member States have accepted and/or proposed still more domains of co-operation leading towards a European Area of Education. Such a development could be explained on the basis of trust-building alone; a trust-building that presently may be stronger between the Member States than between (some) Member States and the Commission.

Internationalisation of education. One cannot answer the increased momentum of European co-operation in education without making reference to the objective trend of “Europenisation” and general internationalisation of the economy and labour markets. Member States have been co-operating within the last 10-20 years in order to answer the challenge of a still more international/global interrelationship between all factors of societal life and development. Education and human resources are, if not at the centre of attention, on the agenda of many international meetings within the context of international co-operation (OECD, ILO, UNESCO, Council of Europe, G8, World Bank etc.) Co-operation in the field of education throughout the last years has therefore come on the agenda in all international contexts. European co-operation in education has followed the trend as well. The “Europenisation” of education has provoked the development of a strong feeling of “mutual accountability” between Ministers of Education.

Preparing for Enlargement The accelerating momentum of co-operation in education between the Member States could furthermore be explain by the prospects of a “Europe of 30”. The Eastern and Central European countries are all undergoing profound societal changes affecting their educational systems. Although the quality of school education in particular in these countries is at the level of the best performing countries in the Union,³¹

³¹ See the comparative tables in: Report European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture “European Report on Quality of School Education – Sixteen Quality Indicators”, Luxembourg, 2001

these countries are all demanding to participate in European educational co-operation in view of further improving their systems. Present Member States are therefore preparing for the enlargement by agreeing on procedures, principles and content of co-operation in education for the “next ten years”.

“Politicisation” of initiatives. The momentum the last two to three years could be explained on the grounds that the initiative is still taken more on the highest political level. Not only have we experienced initiatives taken directly and personally by Ministers (the Bologna and Florence declarations), but in the case of the Lisbon conclusions, the initiative has been taken by Heads of State. The “politicisation” of initiatives during the last few years in the field of education of injecting, “from the top”, an acceleration and deepening of European co-operation might have been an answer to the more slow and more conservative development of Ministries and National educational authorities. The latest development experienced in the Lisbon conclusions where Heads of State have taken the initiative, is a continuation of the politicisation trend. The accelerating momentum of co-operation in education after Lisbon is thus the reaction of Ministers of education in response to the message given from the political top. It is thus an answer from Ministers of education to recuperate the initiative.

3. Future of European Co-operation in Education

Education policy co-operation provides a central and strategic experience concerning European integration in the field of policy areas of co-operation. The multitude of initiatives taken within recent years and months, show that Member States along with the Commission are searching for modes of co-operation that can answer the challenges of deepening in a political field where subsidiarity plays its full role.

The Rolling Agenda was developed on the basis of the will of the Member States laid the ground for the open method of co-ordination, 1. The Rolling Agenda was precisely developed to ensure more stability in the European education agenda, making it possible to define challenges and develop new solutions over a longer period of time, disconnected from the changing and short-term agendas of different Presidencies. This element of stability of the Rolling Agenda has led to a certain de-politicisation of European educational issues. It has been strengthened by the Lisbon approach which includes educational objectives for 2010. On the other hand, the setting up of the Spring European Council made the agenda gain “politicisation” again. In the recent debate in the Education Council (12.02.2001) on the follow-up to the “Report on Objectives of Educational systems” – meant as a ten-year action plan, some Member States wanted to introduce a “regular” report on education to be sent to the Summit (politicisation) and others, especially Germany, wanted a follow-up without direct engagements to report to the Summit (de-politicisation). This demonstrates the sensitivity of the Member States in this field and shows that consequently education has become a subject of “high politics”.

The Lisbon conclusions implicitly give the Union the mandate to develop a “common interest approach” in education going beyond national diversities as can already be seen in the demand to Ministers of Education to debate common objectives of educational systems. This mandate will lead to an increase in the European dimension of national educational policies. It will again increase the dynamics of inter-governmental co-operation (see the multitude of already existing trends in that direction in education), while it is also likely to give a greater community dimension to education policy co-

operation between the Member States. An accelerating inter-governmental dynamics will probably increase the likelihood of seeing the Community dimension increase too: this latter interrelationship between inter-governmental and Community initiatives has been happening in the education field and is precisely the message of this text. Rather than opposing these two dimensions of co-operation in Europe, we see them as being complementary. In education, deepening, i.e. more convergence and more intense inter-relationships between educational systems, goes hand in hand with subsidiarity. If tensions between the two should emerge, the Commission would play a crucial role.

The open method of co-ordination, as presented in the Lisbon conclusions, is a general paradigm for which each policy field would have to find its own precise mode of procedure. The European employment strategy has been considered a reference example, although the method of co-operation in education, as it exists according to the Treaty, has a greater legitimacy basis, as it is subject both to majority votes in the council and to co-decision procedures of the European Parliament. However, one strength of the European Employment Strategy that seems to be missing as concerns co-operation in education, is the follow-up and the culture of evaluation, meant as warnings to Member States which are failing to implement guidelines. What would be the equivalent of guidelines for the education field: Indicators, benchmarks, objectives or recommendations? These latter tools and procedures would have to be agreed upon and put in place for the open method of co-ordination to be operational in the field of education. The route to follow must rely and capitalise on the premises and assets already in place in the field of educational policies as they have developed in recent years. The experiences with the development of the Rolling Agenda, permit us to be optimistic. The negotiations with the Member States during the coming months up to the Barcelona Summit in March 2002 will show in which precise form and in which specific areas such a method can be used in the field of education.

Four last elements would have to be reflected on concerning future developments in education policies.

In the field of education, what would be the respective merits between an elaborated open method of co-ordination on the one hand, and a reinforced co-operation (as revised by the Nice Summit) on the other hand?

The momentum of co-operation in the field of education within the last few years have been strongly lead by the Member States in co-operation with the European Commission. Giving the important role played by the European Parliament, the Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of Regions in developing co-operation in the field of education ? What future role will they have ? How will the role of these other European institutions evolve in the context of the open method of co-ordination in education policies ?

Furthermore, the experiences made in the Socrates programme to act as a pioneer programme for the co-operation with accession countries (as mentioned some 30 European countries presently participate in the Socrates actions) tell us the political force transmitted by such actions “near to the citizens”. Would the ten years agenda in the report on the “Objectives of the Educational systems”, which has been transmitted to the Stockholm Summit, not be a precious occasion for political co-operation in view of building a Europe-wide area of education ?

And finally. What revisions of Treaty articles concerning education might be envisaged in order to institutionalise future new methods of co-ordination and co-operation ?

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