European Education and Training Programs

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Abstract European Union is an international entity with a multidimensional character. It has many institutions and politics connected with different aspects of the citizens' life in the member states of the European Union. Education and training are activities which are also incorporated in the main policies of the European Union. So, the main goal of this paper will be to examine the current situation in the field of training and education in the European Union, by making a retrospection of the programs in the past, analyzing the current programs and predicting the future steps in these areas. This goal will be achieved by using descriptive, comparative and analytical methods.

1. Introduction

The European Union is an international entity which is constituted with the Maastricht Treaty – 1993, and the European Community is established few years after the Second World war with the Treaty establishing a European coal and steel community, Paris, 1951, Treaty establishing a European economic community, Rome, 1957, and Treaty establishing a European atomic agency, Rome, 1957.

There are many institutions in the European Union which conduct, implement and control the various activities in different areas and fields. Some of them are: European Council, Council of the European Union (Council of ministers), European Commission, European Parliament, European Court of justice, European Court of auditors, etc.

EU also has many policies, programmes and projects which reflect the interests of the “European” citizens in different areas of their daily life. One of these policies is education, training and youth in the European Union and its member states. This policy generates many programmes, projects and operative activities which will be mentioned, examined and analyzed in this paper.

2. General information on education, training and youth in the European Union

Top-quality education and training are vital if EU is to develop as a knowledge society and compete effectively in the globalising world economy. Education policy as such is decided by each EU country, but together they set common goals and share best practices. In addition, the EU funds numerous programmes allowing its citizens to make the most of their personal development and the EU’s economic potential by studying, training or doing voluntary work in other countries. Students, teachers and educational establishments from other countries, particularly those bordering the EU or planning to join the Union, are eligible to take part in many of the programmes in this area, which are launched by the European Union. Through other programmes and cooperation agreements, EU also promotes exchanges and courses in European integration with some 80 countries around the world, from Mongolia to Mexico and Algeria to Australia.

3. History of the education and training programmes in the European Union

Education is now recognised at the highest EU level as an area for cooperation between member states and programmes such as Erasmus are some of the most high profile and well-known of all community actions. But, it was not always like this, because the framework for action on education and training has taken 30 years to develop.

Education was absent in the early years of European integration between 1948 and 1968, with the focus on building up economies in the aftermath of World War II. The founding fathers of the European Community felt that the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental body established in 1949, was the right forum to discuss cooperation in education and culture between member states and this remained the case in the following decades.

However, the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community in 1957, did contain the seeds of future cooperation in education and training, laying down several principles for dealing with issues such as on-the-job training and the recognition of qualifications across borders.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the situation gradually changed, as the vision of the European Community widened.
However, there was no consensus on how action should be organised, and over the course of several years, it became clear that a new basis for cooperation would be needed.

It was not until 1976 that the principles of cooperation were adopted by education ministers under the first Community action plan on education. This non-binding Resolution identified six priorities for actions: educating the children of migrant workers, closer relations between education systems in Europe, the compilation of documentation and statistics, higher education, the teaching of foreign languages and equal opportunities. School education was also taken on board.

Community actions started with pilot projects, study visits and exchanges of information, which initially focused on the transition of young people to working life; cooperation and exchanges between universities, through joint study programmes and that was the precursor of the Erasmus programme; the education of children of migrant workers; and the exchange of information.

Cooperation was difficult in these early years due to the lack of a legal basis at the Community level and limited resources. Action was blocked completely between 1978 and 1980, but took off again in the early 1980s. However, these years created the essential conditions for more significant progress later on and carved out a totally new way of cooperating within the European Community. These can be seen as the first application of the subsidiary principle that now underpins EU laws. The principle means that member states cooperate while respecting the diversity of national situations and the power of member states' governments.

The second half of the 1980s saw the launch of a number of diversified and increasing large scale projects. Comett (1986) was the first, followed by Erasmus (1987), Petra (1987), Youth for Europe (1988), Lingua (1989), Eurotechnet (1989), Force (1990), and Tempus (1990). The adoption of these programmes was not easy on the political level, with national governments wary of interference. However, on the ground they were received well and proved to be major successes from the start.

Cooperation accelerated with the implementation of these programmes, with budgets far larger than those for the first action programme. For comparison, between 1990 and 1994 funding for all the programmes accounted for € 1 billion, compared with 10 years earlier, when € 14 million had been earmarked for the first action programme between 1980 and 1984.

The expansion and higher profile of Community cooperation on education and training boosted the recognition and status of these areas within the European Commission. The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 gave education legal status in the newly established European Union, and made the European Parliament and Council jointly responsible for cooperation in education and training. Action entered a new phase, especially with the rise of globalisation and the information society increasingly underlining the importance of education and training. The concepts of 'knowledge-based society' and 'lifelong learning' were coined and became increasingly well-known.

By 1995 a separate Directorate General of the European Commission was set up for education and culture. Programmes were consolidated in two stages. From 1995 to 1999 the six programmes were merged into two – Socrates for education and Leonardo da Vinci for vocational training. New measures were created such as Comenius for schools which now came under Community jurisdiction. The period from 2000 to 2006 saw further transformations, but it was only with the fourth and current generation of programmes (2007-2013) that more significant changes could be made.\(^1\)

In this context, we should also mention the Sorbonna Declaration (25 May 1998), which is common document of the Ministers of education of France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. This Declaration is entitled as “Common Declaration of harmonisation of the architecture of the European system on higher education”. As Kekenovski and Masevski (2003) are saying, the main point of this Declaration is to help EU and its member states to create a framework for mutual recognising of qualifications, acquired in different countries, but also to improve the student mobility and possibilities for employment of the youth.

The Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999) is also known as “The space of the European higher education”. It is signed by the ministers of education in 29 countries. This Declaration is focused on several goals: the cycles in higher education, the establishment of the ECTS (European credit transfer system), promotion of mobility of students, professors and academic staff, improvement of the quality in higher education and creation of unified working methodologies, cooperation of the appropriate institutions in different countries, etc.

\(^1\) [http://europa.eu/pol/educ/index_en.htm](http://europa.eu/pol/educ/index_en.htm)
4. Current situation in the area of education and training in the European Union and current programmes and activities

The launching of the Lisbon strategy in 2000, laying out the economic, social and environmental strategy for the EU up to 2010, brought education and training further to the forefront in its aim of achieving a ‘Europe of knowledge’. The strategy brought about the greatest changes to cooperation in the area and has made education and training of key importance to EU. For the first time, a single integrated framework was adopted by the European Council and a single programme devoted to lifelong learning, but also a new ‘Youth in action’ programme launched. Again, the funds allocated to education and training increased dramatically. In the 2007-2013 period the total should exceed over 1% of the Community budget, compared to only 0.1% in 1986.

After the Lisbon strategy was adopted, a new basis for policy cooperation was established, under the ‘Education and training 2010 work programme’. This established the basis for all subsequent education and training actions, set five overriding benchmarks and applies a new working method – ‘the open method for coordination’. Meanwhile, other developments have been happening in parallel. The Bologna process was launched in 1999 by 30 countries to create convergence between higher education systems and achieve a ‘European higher education area’, by 2010. The Copenhagen Process, signed in 2002, enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training across Europe. The decision to continue successful cooperation at EU – level under the open method of coordination was taken in May 2009, when the Education Council adopted the follow-up to the 2010 programme, the ‘Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)’.

The EU has introduced Europass documents, which present qualifications in a standard format. This make it easier for both workers and employers to understand and recognise qualifications from other countries, and thereby easier to work abroad. The Europass documents include the: Europass CV; Europass language passport; Europass mobility (recording time spent abroad for learning). The EU is not only facilitating the recognition of qualifications via the Europass documents, but also by making national education systems more comparable. This will not be done by a harmonisation of educational systems but rather through a common European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. By 2012, every new qualification issued in the EU will have a reference to one of the eight EQF reference levels.

The EQF is the result of work in the so-called Copenhagen process. Thirty-two countries, including EU member states, discuss vocational education and training (VET) issues in this forum. They are also working on a European credit system for vocational education and training, as well as on a European network of quality assurance for VET. In higher education, EU is working with 19 other countries through the ‘Bologna process’ to create a European higher education area (EHEA) by 2010. The EHEA process promotes mutual recognition of periods of study, comparable qualifications and uniform quality standards.

The European Institute of innovation and technology is a new flagship body for pan European excellence in higher education, research and innovation. It will benefit from EU funding of € 309 million for the period 2008-2013.

The Institute will focus on translating research results into commercial applications by creating ‘knowledge and innovation communities’. This is a new model of partnership involving universities, research organisations, companies, foundations and other entities. Initial priorities will include climate change, renewable sources of energy and the next generation of information and communication technologies.

Policies for young people are not restricted to education. A European Youth Pact establishes common principles on opportunities for young people. It recognises their right to equal opportunities for participation in all aspects of society: high-quality education and training; job search facilities; jobs appropriate to their skills; social security entitlements and housing. The Youth in action programme promotes active involvement in the community and supports projects giving young people a greater sense of EU citizenship. For example, the EU enables individuals to work as a volunteer in other countries via the European Voluntary Service. The EU is investing a total of € 900 million in these activities between 2007 and 2013.

The European Commission has integrated its various educational and training initiatives under a single umbrella, the Lifelong Learning Programme. With a significant budget of nearly € 7 billion for the period 2007-2013, the new programme replaces previous education, vocational training and e-learning programmes, which ended in 2006. The programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. There are four sub-programmes focusing on different stages of education and training and continuing previous programmes: Comenius for schools; Erasmus for higher education; Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training; Grundtvig for adult education.
4.1. Comenius

The Comenius programme focuses on the first phase of education, from pre-school and primary to secondary schools. It is relevant for all members of the education community: pupils, teachers, local authorities, parents’ associations, non-government organisations, teaching training institutes, universities and all other educational stuff. Part of the Lifelong Learning Programme, Comenius seeks to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and educational stuff of the diversity of European cultures, languages and values. It helps young people acquire the basic life skills and competences necessary for their personal development, for future employment and for active citizenship. The programme addresses issues strongly related to current discussions and developments in school policy.

Comenius has the following goals: to improve and increase the mobility of pupils and educational staff in different member states; to enhance and increase partnerships between schools in different member states, with at least 3 million pupils taking part in joint educational activities in 2010; to encourage language learning, innovative ICT-based content, services and better teaching techniques and practices; to enhance the quality and European dimension of teacher training; to improve pedagogical approaches and school management. This programme focuses on the following priority areas: motivation for learning and learning-to-learn skills; key competences – improving language learning, greater literacy, making science more attractive, supporting entrepreneurship, and reinforcing creativity and innovation; digital educational content and services; school management; addressing socio-economic disadvantages and reducing early school living; participation in sports; teaching diverse groups of pupils; early and pre-primary learning.

4.2. Erasmus

Erasmus is the EU’s flagship education and training programme, enabling more than 180 000 students to study and work abroad each year, as well as supporting cooperation actions between higher education institutions across Europe. It caters not only for students, but also for professors and business staff who want to teach abroad and for university stuff who wants to be trained abroad. The Programme is named after the humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus of Roterdam (1465-1536) whose travels for work and study took in the era’s great centres of learning, including Paris, Leuven and Cambridge. Like the man, the Erasmus programme places great importance on mobility and furthering career prospects through learning. By leaving his fortune to the University of Basel, he became a pioneer of the mobility grants which now bear his name.

Studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches student’s lives in the academic filed, but also in the acquisition of intercultural skills and self-reliance. Staff exchanges have similar beneficial effects, both for the people participating and for the home and host institutions. In addition to mobility actions, the Programme supports higher education institutions to work together through intensive programmes, networks and multilateral projects.

Around 90% of European universities take part in Erasmus and 2 million students have participated since it started in 1987. The annual budget is in excess of € 440 million, more than 4 000 higher education institutions in 31 countries participate, and even more are waiting to join.

Erasmus has become a driver in the modernisation of higher education in Europe and inspired the establishment of the Bologna Process. The general aim of the Programme is to create a ‘European Higher Education Area’ and foster innovation throughout Europe. Erasmus became part of the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme in 2007 and expanded to cover new areas such as student placements in enterprises (transferred from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme), university staff training and teaching for enterprise staff. The Programme seeks to expand its mobility actions even further in coming years, with the target of 3 million Erasmus students by 2012. Actions include support for: students – studying abroad, doing a traineeship abroad, linguistic preparation; universities/higher education institution staff – teaching abroad, receiving training abroad; universities/higher education institutions – intensive programmes, academic and structural networks, multilateral projects; enterprises – hosting students’ placements, teaching abroad, participating in university cooperation projects.

Higher education institutions which want to participate in Erasmus actions must have an Erasmus University Charter. The Charter aims to guarantee a high level of quality in mobility and cooperation by setting out fundamental principles for all Erasmus actions that participating institutions must follow. The European Commission is responsible for the Erasmus programme’s overall implementation and its different actions. So-called ‘decentralised actions’ regarding individual mobility are run by national agencies in the 31 participating countries. Centralised actions such as networks, multilateral projects and the award of the Erasmus University Charter are managed by the Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture, based in Brussels.
4.3. Leonardo da Vinci

The Leonardo da Vinci programme links policy to practice in the field of vocational education and training (VET). Projects range from those giving individuals the chance to improve their competences, knowledge and skills through a period abroad, to Europe-wide-cooperation between training organisations. Part of the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme, the programme funds a wide range of actions, notably cross-border mobility initiatives; cooperation projects to develop and spread innovation; and thematic frameworks. The potential beneficiaries are similarly wide – from trainees in initial vocational training, to people already in the labour market, as well as VET professionals and private or public organisations active in this field.

Leonardo da Vinci enables VET organisations to work with European partners, exchange best practices, increasing the expertise of their staff and respond to the teaching and learning needs of people. It therefore supports efforts to make vocational education more attractive to young people. By helping European citizens to acquire new skills, knowledge and qualifications, the programme also aims to bolster the competitiveness of the European labour market.

Innovation projects have always been at the core of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. They aim to improve the quality of training systems through the development and transfer of innovative policies, contents, methods and procedures within vocational education and training.

4.4. Grundtvig

Launched in 2000 and now part of the general Lifelong Learning Programme, Grundtvig aims to provide adults with ways to improve their knowledge and skills, keeping them mentally fit and potentially more employable. It not only covers learners in adult education, but also the teachers, trainers, education staff and facilities that provide these services. These include relevant associations, counselling organisations, information services, policy-making bodies and others involved in lifelong learning and adult education at local, regional and national levels, such as NGO’s, enterprises, voluntary groups and research centres. There are also actions supporting adult learner mobility, such as exchanges and, now in the 2007-2013 period programme, so-called ‘European Assistantships’.

Specific aims of this Programme, are to: increase the number of people in adult education to 25 000 by 2013, and improve the quality for their experience, whether at home or abroad; improve conditions for mobility so that at least 7 000 people per year by 2013 can benefit from adult education abroad; improve the quality and amount of cooperation between adult education organisations; develop innovative adult education and management practices and encourage widespread application; ensure that people on the margins of society have access to adult education, especially older people and those who left education without basic qualifications; support innovative ICT-based educational content, services and practices.

Actions include support for: mobility, including visits, placements, ‘assistantships’, adult education exchanges (i.e. staff training and professional development) and the preparations needed to plan the exchanges; Grundtvig Learning Partnerships focusing on themes with mutual interest to participating organisations; multilateral projects for improving adult education systems through the development and transfer of innovation and good practice; Grundtvig networks of experts and organisations working on development of the adult education, spreading good practices and supporting partnerships. At least 55% of the total funding for Grundtvig should go towards mobility and partnership activities.

4.5. Macedonia and European education and training programmes

Macedonia, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union, but also before the acquirement of this status, is included in the education and training programmes of the European Union. The first instrument of EU related to education which was used by Macedonia, was the PHARE programme which incorporated many areas, and one of them was education, training and research. This programme was established for the period 1995-1999 and included financial help of € 6,7 billion.

The second instrument CARDS also comprised the segment of education, training and research in its framework. Macedonia was also actively included in the usage of the finances of this instrument, which were about € 4,65 billion for the period 2000-2006.

The current financial instrument for pre-accession – IPA, also incorporates the segment of education and training, and Macedonia is using these finances was or is active participant, and used/uses the privileges which come out of them.
5. Conclusion

According to the presented information in the paper, the only logical conclusion we can draw is that the education and training programmes in the European Union are continually developing, updating and growing. The financial support given to these programmes is rapidly increasing, the number of states involved in them is constantly going up. This means that the quantity and quality of the programmes at the same time, are having rectilinear movement through the history.

Still, a lot has to be done for improvement of the concrete implementation of the programmes for training and education in the European Union, because there is always some discrepancy between the normative and financial structure of the programmes and their operative implementation.

These programmes are a great opportunity not only for the member states in the European Union, but also for the states which are candidates or potential candidates for membership, because they give many opportunities for studying abroad, academic and professional exchanges, getting new experiences, etc.

At the end, we can note that investing in these programmes is very useful, although sometimes is hazardous. However, the final results which outcome from the education and training programmes in the European Union are always bigger than the incomes in them.

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