

Chapter 2

Educational Policy and Educational Programmes in the European Union

A Tool for Political Integration and Economic Competition?

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We have just entered a new millennium; an event very few people in mankind have experienced. The last period of the former century, and especially the beginning of the new one, has been extremely turbulent with the 11th September, 2001 as the most epoch-making incident. We can see both integration and segregation processes occurring at the same time (Clark, 1997; Tjeldvoll and Holmesland, 1997). The Soviet Union, as one of the superpowers, eroded economically and politically in a disintegration process and was formally dissolved in December 1991. At the same time, December 1991, the countries in the European Community went further towards integration and agreed to be a European Union in new treaty made in the little Dutch town of Maastricht. Europe was no longer divided as before, and there was in sight what president Gorbachev some years earlier had called 'The European House' (Gorbachev, 1987).

So far, in many ways, the new European House has been a house of "turbulent disorder" (Bjerkholt, 1993, p. 137). The end of the cold war period did not –paradoxically– bring peace, but conflict and civil war in many areas, and even NATO bombing in the former Yugoslavia, the heart of Europe. The turbulent disorder has been extended more and less worldwide with new alliance and conflict dimensions. Terrorist actions in the USA have provoked military action and mass bombing in Afghanistan. Ideologically, we have again learned the lesson that instability is the most stable element in the modern world. We have seen that the basic principles of freedom and independence are no guarantee for democracy or respect for human rights. We have observed innocent civilians both in the USA and Afghanistan as

victims of terrorist action and bombing. We have seen the increase of nationalism and deep ethnic and religious conflicts.

The European Commission work programme for 2002 (COM 01/620 final, 5-12-2001) focuses on globalisation and international instability as fundamental challenges for EU. The challenges are more concretely linked to the worldwide market for production and trade and the global circulation of information, but also to persisting ethical and territorial conflict, terrorist action, the threat to human rights and organized crime. The Programme is clearly influenced by the events of 11 September which are described as “the defining movement”. The lesson to learn from this event for the Commission is “that there is no retreat from multilateral cooperation”.

On this background we can ask more generally and universally: What is the role of education in this increasing globalisation process? Or more specifically: What has been and what is the role of the policy of education in the European Union?¹

This chapter will focus on educational policy in the Community over a period of time, and to some extent, give an analysis and evaluation of its functions and consequences. My previous research (Karlsen, 1994, 1998) and possibly my Norwegian background will form a basis for the contribution. Norway has a peculiar position in this context. Norway is the only country in Europe, which has applied for membership of EU three times and had two advisory referendums where a majority of the Norwegian people has voted ‘no’.² At the same time the country cooperates with the EU as a member of EEA³ together with Iceland and Liechtenstein. The EEA is an economic agreement for the connection between EU and EEA, but also covers research and education. That means these three countries, together with the 15 member states in EU, participate in research and education programmes with full and equal rights and responsibilities. Norway had even made bilateral agreement with the former EU before the EEA came into force.⁴

¹ The European Union (EU) came into force on 1 November 1993 built on the Treaty of Maastricht. The European Union integrated the European Community (EC) built on the Treaty of Rome of 1957.

² Norway applied for membership first time in May 1962, second time in July 1967 and third time in November 1992. The referendums were held in September 1972 and in November 1994.

³ EEA (European Economic Area) was a result of negotiations between the former EFTA (European Free Trade Association) and EC and came into force on 1 January 1994.

⁴ Norway joined Comett on 1 January 1990, and Erasmus on 1 January 1992.

1. EU AND EDUCATION: A BACKGROUND

When the six European countries signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957 only 12 years had passed since the end of World War II. Based on the important European Coal and Steel Community from 1951, the main project in 1957 was still the economic revival of Europe. Education and training were barely on the agenda. In particular, the judicial foundation of the Treaty of Rome was weak. A single article about education (128) in the Treaty dealt only with vocational training. In addition, Article 57 was about recognition of qualifications for higher education. The judicial foundation of the Treaty of Rome became a serious restriction for political ambitions and *de facto* activities in the period until The Treaty of Maastricht. The division between vocational training and general education was problematical in political execution. Article 235, as an umbrella for different cases, was used as a judicial foundation for decisions within the field of education. These problems can, to some degree, explain why the period until the early 1970s was marked by prudence and reservation in relation to educational policy.

From the early 1970s, and particularly the late 1980s, the activity related to education expanded. Gradually a common policy of education was formed *defined as formal decisions about aims in the field of education and training, and use of intended means to achieve these aims*. The common decisions were generally advisory in relation to member states. Two trends are striking for this period. The first is the gradual inclusion of education as a policy area in established institutions and also the formation of new institutions for educational policy. The Council of Ministers started in 1971 with regular meetings between Ministers of Education. In 1974, the Council of Ministers formed an education committee to prepare for their meetings. The Commission established a Directorate for Research, Science and Education in 1973, and a special unit within the Directorate was established in 1989 (Task Force Human Resource, Education, Training and Youth). The European Parliament has been active in this field and formed a committee for education amongst other fields –for example sport. The European Court of Justice dealt with matters related to education.

Another trend is the formulation of content in education as a policy area and choice of policy strategy. The European Council carried out a resolution as early as 1973 about European Identity.⁵ The first action programme for education was launched in 1976 (OJ C 38, 19-2-1976). But soon education appeared as a sensitive area because it touched the very core of a nation:

⁵ The title of the declaration from the Summit in Copenhagen 1973 was *European Identity in relation to the world*. The declaration was initiated by the former France President Pompidou.



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