

PREOCCUPATIONS FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A KNOWLEDGE EUROPEAN SPACE

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Key words: continuous learning, European space of knowledge, education integration.

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present in a coherent manner the actual preoccupations related to the creation of a knowledge European area. A special attention is granted to permanent learning that represents a real desideratum of the contemporary economic and social development. Among the general conclusions referring to the permanent learning we can mention that evolution to this kind of learning is a gradual process. A new approach of permanent learning also appears trying to change traditional assumptions about the life's apportion in different phases of learning, working and retirement. This approach is related to the modernization of society and economy, led through public initiatives and supported by social partners.

1. Romania, Partner of the Stability Agreement from the European South - East Area

The end of the 2nd Millennium marked some memorable events of the political will, regarding the educational development and training from Europe. The Bologna Declaration from 19th June 1999, widely defines this project and presents the concrete objective that the European countries propose themselves for the materialization of this desiderate. Romania, from the position of the Bologna Declaration subscriber, joined the definition of Europe as a knowledge space, expressing the decision of the education institutions from the subscriber countries and playing the main part in the construction of this education European Space. Throughout the united Europe's objectives there can be found the promotion of the cooperation in education and training quality assurance. All these pled for the introduction of a quality management systems in the training services delivering organizations at an European level, as well as, the objective existence of a restricted competition between the providers of training services, the training alignment to the common standards for all the countries from the European Union, the offer of some educational programs, appreciated and certificated after the known standards, the attraction of external financing throughout offers of educational and training programs, guaranteed by their quality and known at an international level.

It is well known the fact that the governmental budgets assigned to the education and training can not sustain the tertiary education at a higher level, as it was possible the last century. More and more frequently the growing of the persons' mobility throughout the introduction, together with the transferable credits, of the same evaluation criteria and training certificates, as well as the rising of the activities from connected services of the training and research process to the international standards and the growth of the studying programs for the ones who want to study in the paying system.

The signing of the Stability Pact at Sofia for the South-East European Area (14th November 1999), reiterates the objectives linked to the development of the Knowledge European Space, with the accent on the quality assurance development in the European countries. Throughout this new political act, the political premises for the cooperation intensification in the region are created. In this context, the introduction of the quality assurance systems is the necessary condition for the essential consolidation of the organizations delivering training services in the region, which, can compete on the educational market, even though, in the case when the education quality can be compared, they can take advantage of an unique chance to be partners and associates in order to offer successful training and research programs. Romania, a country that adhered to the European Union, and partner of the stability pact from the area, with a tradition in education, that generated certain values, can become a credible partner in a new context, in which the strategic management of education is combining with the evaluation of a education quality, adequate to the requirements of the XXIst century, dominated of the globalization and informational technology development impact. However, the Romanian schools, as well as the other European schools are in a continuous transformation process. It is foreseen that the continuous learning, in other terms lifelong learning, will become the major preoccupation and objective of the educational and training services provided by the organizations. The continuous learning is not a slogan, but a real desiderate of the contemporary economical and social development from the informational era. In fact, we assist to the transfer of the knowledge controlled by some specialists and experts to a world based on the “learning culture”, surrounded by new learning experiences, the digital era making possible the continuous educational environment creation, during the whole human life, passing by the time and space restrictions.

The concept of permanent learning refers to the learning at a pre-school age till the end of life and includes the formal, non-formal and informal training. In other words, the continuous learning contains “all the individual activities within a lifetime that enrich the knowledge, practices and personal skills, with no importance where and how they were assimilated”. However, the concept of continuous learning reflects the ideals that own the human fundamental rights.

Throughout the concept of the permanent learning, it is made a connection between the educational system and the professional training. Beginning with the “Continuous Learning European Year” (1996), when the Council of Europe adopted the conclusions on this subject for the first time, the permanent learning idea achieved a rising importance, at the E.U. level and, as well as, at the national level. This represents a key element of the new economical and social strategy adopted in march 2000 by the Council of Europe, for the decade 2001-2010. However, they constituted themselves in a principle that orientates the working program of the European Commission regarding the concrete objectives of the educational and training systems (“Education and Training 2010”) that represents the only comprehensive frame for the Communities’ cooperation in this area.

2. The International Development of Education throughout the Continuous Learning

A series of international developments, especially the adoption of continuous learning as a theme that guides the OECD activities till 1996 regarding the education, contributed to the permanent learning idea promotion. The fact that the importance of

the permanent learning is more and more acknowledged by the public opinion is revealed by the “Eurobarometer” investigation, made by the European Commission in January/February 2003. In November 2001, the Commission presented a communicate with the theme “Continuous Learning European Area Realization” that led to the adoption of the Council of Europe Resolution on the continuous learning, on 27th June 2002, which states that the “continuous education and training are essential ways for the social cohesion, active citizenship, professional accomplishment, as well as the working force adaptability and occupation promotion”.

The continuous learning “facilitates the free mobility for the European citizens and permits the aspirations’ realizations of the European Union in becoming more prosper, competitive, tolerant and democratic”. In march 2003, the Commission transmitted to the E.U. states, EFA/EFTA, as well as the candidate and in course of adhering countries, a questionnaire referring to the impact’s resolution and its communicate. The questionnaire goal was to prepare a report on this matter that contributes to the ulterior development of a comprehensive and coherent continuous learning strategy, throughout the inventory of the participant countries initiatives. The report, elaborated with the support of the European Center for Professional Training Development (ECPTD) offers an analysis of the responses of the E.U. and EEA/EFTA countries. With all the differences between the national situations regarding problems such as the development level of the adults training systems, education integration and professional training or the level of centralization/decentralization of the systems, their fixation within an European context was considered positive. Thus, the exchange of good practices can be promoted throughout the attention orientation towards those procedures or innovations considered exemplary, worth to be taken into consideration by other countries. Throughout the general conclusions referring to the continuous learning, we can find the one which states that the evolution throughout a continuous learning strategy is a gradual process.

We can establish progresses in E.U. member countries, even though there are different going points and differences in advance. The national strategies vary in coherence, but there is a real progress in the realization of a culture of continuous learning with a wide acceptance and public participation. In general, the education and training politics of the member states reflects, in great measure, the preoccupation for continuous learning and the interpretation of permanent learning in a wide context, which covers all types of learning, from all the institutions’ types, with all types of instruments and pedagogical approaches. From their perspective, the continuous learning addresses to all the population, with a particular aspect on the special needs of some target groups.

Eventhough the continuous learning principle is accepted in all the member states, there is a considerable variation of the practical integration degree, in some or all the learning system components. Many laws from the E.U. member states take into account the continuous learning considerations and priorities, but it seems that there are few specific laws or they are completely missing regarding the continuous learning, eventhough there are political documents and strategies in this way. The significant aspects linked to this process refers to continuous learning as a problem that focuses on the population as a whole, even if the accent is put on the initial education and the active population training.

A classification of the continuous learning typology is difficult to be made, because of the wide range of permanent learning culture and structures from the E.U. member

states. However, a simplified approach led to the identification of some continuous learning methods, in relation to which, the countries can try to identify their permanent position, such as a culture of well developed continuous learning from the early age to the end of life, with a wide public acceptance and a rising rate of participation, that covers not only the training linked to the profession, but also the personal development and active citizenship, offered throughout informal, public and/or civil society; the promotion of learning in association with private participation to the recreation learning; an approach regarding the working force occupation, constructed by the solid initial training, centered on the continuous training, with the goal of adaptation to structures and production processes in a continuous change, with a powerful attendance, from the public and industrial sector; the training at the working place accompanied by legal rights, admitted and collectively negotiated to education and training; the suited career development as a private problem.

More and more frequent there is a new approach of the continuous learning that tries to change the traditional suppositions about the division of life into learning, working and retirement distinctive phases. This approach is correlated with the society and economy modernization widely lead throughout public initiatives and supported by social partners.

Another social inclusion type approach that, throughout reporting to modern world, mainly addresses to the one, whose education and training experience was unsatisfied or inadequate, manifests its necessity, reason for which solutions for persons reemployment are searched for. In an experience of learning that, especially in initial phases, is centered on the personal development and leads to a level of the basis and personal skills that everyone should achieve at the end of the initial education, known public and education organizations within the civil society are implied.

Eventhough the continuous learning is centered on the individual, there are less references regarding the development of the basic skills and continuous learning attractivity within permanent and basic learning period. The continuous learning process attracts the necessity of some changes in the teachers training, with accent on the teacher role changing – seen as a guide of the independent learning, whose main duty is the determination of the consciousness need of the lifelong learning implication. This is an important development, its impact being inevitably on a long term. However, there is some attention on supporting measures that will help the persons recognize their educational deficiencies and give them motivation to frequent courses (teaching reading and writing programs and mathematics calculations).

Due to the national standards development, as well as the risen of the individual performance necessary level, in the majority of the member states, many measures are addressed to the adults with no qualifications or with a low level of qualification that risk to become disadvantaged by their lag behind from the professional point of view. These measures suppose the access to formal programs of specific initial or vocational education and to the adults' general education, in various formal and informal frames. It is known the role of the social partners (especially in the committees and partnerships associated form) in the initial and continuous professional education and training. There are relatively few references to their role in the participation stimulation and innovation in the continuous learning area, regardless the European level common frame that we anteriorly referred to. In England, a Common Inspection Frame foresees the formal evaluation of every trainings provider twice a year. In Austria, a governmental commission has the responsibility to develop a quality management national system and

performances criteria identification. In other countries, there are preoccupations for the education improvement, teachers and trainers professional development, qualification of the training organizations employees, professional training and educational processes quality evaluation.

The idea of the education conceiving as a continuous phenomenon that identifies itself with the individual existence, has very far away origins, this affirmation, being sustained by the revealing appreciation of the Seneca Philosopher: “Even the old men have to study”, as he considered in the Ist century. In the years 1970-1980, in a complex world with a rapid and global transformation, the continuous education became a key concept of the educational politics. FAURE Report – 1972, a document of reference for the promotion of permanent education, consecrates the passing from the paradigm of the education focused on school to that of the permanent education. So, the entire educational system has to be rethought through the reference to the permanent education system. Permanent education “refers to the activity of formation-development of human personality entirely approached, integrating all the valuable resources on the vertical and horizontal of educational system, in a real continuum of time and space”, so: *education stages* – preschool, school, after school ages and life cycles; *education with all its dimensions* – intellectual, ethic, technologic, esthetic, physic etc; *all the forms of education* – formal, non-formal, informal, school etc.

As a system, permanent education has three specific components: initial education, adults’ education and diffuse education. UNESCO defined adults’ education as “the ensemble of organized education processes which through the contents, level and method, formal or non-formal extends or displace the initial education”.

3. The strategic preoccupation referring to the improvement of training systems in European Union

At the beginning of this millennium, because of the economic changes caused by the enlargement of European Union with new member states it appeared the need of European cooperation in the field of education and training. In the same time, new important actors appeared and because they have the necessary skills and knowledge they develop in a sustained rhythm the partnerships at a European level in the field of education and training. Development perspectives of educational and training systems from EU member states refers to two aspects: national policies and the reforms of national training systems and also the cooperation at a European level in order to achieve the objectives settled at Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002). Through the Lisbon Statement (March, 2000) a very important strategic objective for member states and candidate ones to EU was established and this was the change of European Union till 2010 in the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world, based on knowledge. Education and training are considered key factors in the achievement of this objective, through the preparation of the transition to an economy and a society based on knowledge, through better policies regarding the development of the informational society and research and development activity, and also the advancement into the process of structural reform, in order to assure the competitiveness and development of the internal market. As a part of this strategy, EU enforces till 2010 the achievement of educational and continue formation systems at a global level, assuring the access of all citizens to new and advanced learning opportunities during all their lives. As a consequence of the meeting of European Council at Lisbon precise objectives were

established in the field of education and training systems till 2010 that were adopted as development poles in the field.

The improvement of quality and learning standards is essential in the conditions of a competitive and dynamic society with citizens capable to develop their skills and competencies. Also the improvement of the supply of training services, including learning to the workplace too, represents an efficient way to prevent and fight against unemployment. The components of this objective refer to the improvement of education and formation of teachers/formative; the development of the needed skills in the context of a society based on knowledge (operational level of reading and elementary mathematics, actualization of professional skills, social and personal competencies, the preoccupation for culture and art, the maintenance of the ability to learn) and the assurance of access to informational technologies (performing endowment of schools and training centers, the involvement of teachers and formatives in the use of these technologies, networks and multimedia resources). In this direction the raising of labor force in the technical and scientific field is enforced (as a necessity of the increasing the level of scientific culture in a society based on knowledge); the optimal utilization of resources (getting the best results in the utilization of human and material resources through the improvement of quality assurance and efficient use of resources, investing more in human resources development); facilitating the access of all persons to education and training systems.

Education and training systems have to adjust to the permanent learning process through the increasing of the attractivity of training offers, coherence of integrated education-training systems and also through the exceeding of traditional barriers between formal, non-formal and informal education. The components of this objective refer to a medium open to learning (the change of existent education and training methods, flexible consultancy, the adaptation to family schedule, the use of IT&C techniques, public-private partnerships, the allocation of the necessary resources) and the increasing of learning attractiveness (the utilization of stimulating methods, validation systems of professional experience). The increasing of professional and geographic mobility, communication without borders are the reasons for the acceptance of economic globalization challenge by EU. Europe's Citizens have to prepare for an international and multicultural society, in which there are competitive education and training systems. In this context intermediate objectives established such as the strengthen of the linkages between professional activities, research and the entire society (the connection between schools, formation institutions and firms, organizations, research institutes for labor force occupancy and the development of innovation and scientific progress); the development of the entrepreneurial spirit; the expansion of learning foreign languages (learning has to reflect the multilingualist European Area that contributes to the development of mobility and competitiveness); the increasing of mobility and exchanges of participants (Programs like "Socrates", "Leonardo da Vinci", "Youth", the transmission of good practices); the strengthen of European cooperation (the creation of a Europe without borders in the field of education and training, education for a democratic citizenship, strategic cooperation with countries from South-East Europe).

The concrete actions refer to some generic aspects of EU mission in education and training. These include the development of quality and the status of a continue formation; the assurance of the relevance and perceptiveness of training programs in order to answer to individual, social and economic needs; the improvement of the

access to learning systems; the increasing of the investments' value and the rational usage of resources. The Action program is developing in a synergist way with other European initiatives in the field of education and training, such as: permanent education, mobility, quality, innovation facilitation, the creation and administration of a data base of educational and continue formation knowledge. The Resolution of Europe Council referring to permanent education (27 June 2002) appeals to all EU countries to cooperate and establish efficient measures for the promotion of this concept. White Charter of European Commission called "A new impulse for European Young" (21 November 2001) establishes the new European framework of the cooperation between youngsters, highlighting the importance of education and non-formal training. As a consequence of the report regarding the precise objectives of the education and training European systems, Europe Council adopted a working program (14 June 2002), for the establishment of the official ways of validation non-formal training.

Copenhagen Statement (30 November 2002) for the promotion of the development of European cooperation in the field of education and professional formation, appeals to the member states of European Union in order to "develop the policies, systems and practices sustained by information, guidance and consultancy at all the levels of education, training and occupancy of labor force to assure: the access to learning, professional formation and training; the transferability and recognition of competencies and qualifications, with the aim of developing the occupational and geographic mobility of Europe's citizens". This statement creates a new vision on the ways through which the requirements referring to the professional education and formation have to be adapted and improved in order to achieve European objectives. As a consequence of this statement, through the Resolution of EU Council (2004) there are established the priorities for the next period regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning, as well as the realization of a guide for the elaboration of the policies in the field.

Bologna and Copenhagen Statements have as a basis an important motivation, that of creating at a European level a labor force with high competencies and a great mobility. That means a focus of actions both at a national level and also at a European one on assuring the transparency, qualifications' recognition, the implementation of a system of credits and quality. For the efficiency of these actions in the field of education and training, there were revised social policies through the establishment of a strategy for European labor force occupancy and European Social Fund, research-development policies and the policies initiated by social partners. Considering the phenomenon of globalization and the progress made in other parts of the globe, there have also been established the basis of a great international cooperation, in order to compare the quality of education and training at the level of the member states of EU, but also with other regions in the world. So, bilateral agreements were initiated with Canada and USA for facilitating the cooperation in professional education and formation. At the level of Europe Council, there are made periodic evaluations and communications regarding the progress achieved in the fulfillment of the objectives established at Lisbon and Copenhagen. With the occasion of the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (October 2004), there were established the priorities at a European level for the next period. These refer to the development of a European framework of qualifications' recognition, based on transparency and mutual trust; the development and the implementation of a credit transfer system for the professional education and formation; the analysis of professors and formatives' needs regarding

learning, professional formation process and also the opportunities of increasing the attractiveness of the occupation of a formative, as well as the permanent actualization of professional skills and the improvement of the aim, precision and the consistency of the statistics regarding the professional education and formation, for a more realistic evaluation of the progress fulfilled.

Through Maastricht Handout (December 2004) of European Commission, ministries and social partners responsible with professional education and formation, there have been established that the use of instruments, references and common principles will have national priorities in order to sustain the reform of the system and existent practices in professional education and formation, regarding the transparency (Europass), lifelong guidance for continue learning; quality assurance, identification and validation of non-formal and informal training; the development of professional education and formation systems according with the needs of the persons and risk groups on labor market, especially those who haven't completed their studies, those with reduced competencies, persons with disabilities and unemployed people as well as the increasing of social partners' involvement, in order to enhance the visibility and the mutual trust. European Commission's Report regarding the implementation of „Education & Training 2010” programme mentions a series of indicators for the achievement of the objectives in the field of education and training such as: the increase of the number of persons attending gymnasium; the increase of the number of participants to adults' training and education; the reduction of the number of persons that don't complete school or vocational education and a greater participation to mathematics, science and technology courses.

The recommendations of European Commission for the next period refer to the implementation of the strategies for permanent learning. Through these we can also include the actions for the development and utilization of a common framework for quality assurance in education and professional formation. The same approach oriented towards the development of human resources is detailed within the Cohesion Policy, as a support of economic growth and labor force occupancy, for the period 2007-2013. Implementation strategies take into consideration also the new member states Romania and Bulgaria that have to cope with a challenge without precedent together with the other 25 member states, regarding the competitiveness and internal cohesion of EU. The new conditions created through the enlargement of European Union had as a consequence the revisal of Lisbon Statement that besides the establishment of the three strategic dimensions: economic, social and environmental mentions the necessity of mobilizing all the national and communitaire resources, inclusively the establishment of the political cohesion. Through the objectives related to the cohesion policy within EU, the increasing of investments in human resources, the enhance of the potential of labor force occupancy and the introduction and implementation of the reform in educational and training systems, the promotion of quality and education, professional and managerial formation's attractiveness are the most important.

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