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## THE EUROPEAN UNION AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING: AN OVERVIEW OF POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union<sup>1</sup> is a relative newcomer as an actor in the field of education and vocational training. Vocational training featured in the Treaty of Rome of 1957, where it was closely bound to the basic aims of creating a common market for goods, services and capital. Over time, the Union's remit has strayed well beyond these relatively narrow economic boundaries to encompass a broad range of social, cultural and security policies (Hantrais, 2000).

This development is characterised by a sequence of steps in which the competence of the EU in the field of education and training has developed. The range of EU interests and activities has changed from one period to another. Further, influences on the educational agenda often originated in areas other than the educational field. For example, in the 1980s the sharp rise in youth unemployment shifted the emphasis considerably towards education for and in the world of work. At the beginning of the 1990s, the political and economic decision to establish monetary union necessitated closer co-operation in social affairs and education.

The aim of this paper is to trace the changing emphases of the European Union in the field of vocational education and training and to identify the main reasons for these developments. Therefore, it can be seen as an attempt to '[...] understand the interaction of education and society by analyzing the historical forces [...] that had shaped both' (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, p. 6); an approach which was the predominant *modus operandi* in comparative education at the turn of this century. The advocates of this approach used the conclusions of their historical analyses to influence educational reform and the future shape of society (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, pp. 40-57). Considering the ongoing process of European integration and the

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<sup>1</sup> The terms used to refer to what has become known as the European Union have developed gradually. They can be somewhat confusing and are also used interchangeably at times in the relevant literature. This study uses European Union, EU or Union to refer to the supranational actor under investigation. It was founded as the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, changed its name to European Community (EC) in 1967 and formally became the European Union (EU) in 1993. This paper attempts to use the appropriate term for the respective periods under discussion.

The language usage in this study, therefore, follows the pattern in other publications, most importantly in Richardson (1996) and Field (1998).

often very short-term view taken in proposals made for the future of this process, it seems to be more than justified to take the historical dimension into account.

The EU has enjoyed continuous appeal, resulting in growing membership in recent decades and the strong wish of many countries in central and eastern Europe to become a part of the Union (cf. Anderson, 1997, pp. 27-36). Further, unlike other international bodies such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), or the Council of Europe, the European Union rests on a juridical base which can provide for legislation that is binding on Member States, and enforceable by sanctions (Schink, 1993, p. 11). Although these means of enforcement are rarely used in most areas of co-operation, their existence gives the Union a much broader scope for potential action compared to other supranational organisations (Rego, 1997, pp. 7-12; Neave, 1984, pp. 5-7).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the concentration on the European Union is dictated by the political and socio-economic realities in Europe.

The development of provision in the field of education and training will be presented in a chronological account and in five distinct phases to provide a clear picture of different emphases of EU education and training policies at different times. It is inevitable that the identification of historical periods and phases of time is affected by the individual knowledge-base and attitudes of the researcher.<sup>3</sup> Although there were initially mostly informal attempts at co-operation in education and training between European countries immediately after the end of World War II (cf. Moon, 1993), this account starts with the first formal agreements laid down in the founding Treaties of the European Economic Community.

## 2. INITIATION PHASE (1951 – 1963):

### THE TREATIES OF PARIS AND ROME AND THEIR IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The legal basis of the original European Community rests upon three treaties: the Treaty of Paris (1951), which set up the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and the two Treaties of Rome (1957) which set up the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Committee (Euratom).<sup>4</sup> None of the Treaties included substantial provision for general education. Despite the fact that the preamble of the Treaty of Rome declared the will of the six Member States

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account on the differences in the legislative powers of the European Union and the Council of Europe in the field of education and training see Ryba (2000, pp. 246ff.).

<sup>3</sup> For the pitfalls of historical periodisation in comparative education see Phillips (1994). For a different periodisation of EU competences in education and training see, for instance, Müller-Solger et al. (1993) and Hingel (2001).

<sup>4</sup> In the relevant literature, the two latter Treaties are almost exclusively referred to as the 'Treaty of Rome'. This paper will follow this convention. For the text of the three Treaties mentioned in this section see Beutler et al., 1993.

'[...] to lay the foundations for an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe', clear references were made only to vocational education. As a consequence, no subsequent legislation gave the Community any supranational powers concerning schools, colleges and universities, and it was not until the mid-1970s that actions in the field of general education developed progressively on the basis of resolutions (Commission, 1993, Annex B).

Article 56 of the ECSC Treaty included the task for the Community to finance the retraining of employees. Articles 7 and 9 of the Euratom Treaty provided for training programmes and the establishment of a European university for the training of skilled workers. In the EEC Treaty there were several articles dealing with training matters: Article 41 envisaged *inter alia* effective co-ordination of activities in the fields of vocational training and research; Article 50 proposed exchange programmes for young people and employees; Article 57 provided for the mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications in the context of the free movement of persons and the right of establishment, and Article 118 entrusted the Commission with '[...]the task of promoting close co-operation between Member States [...]' in a variety of social questions, particularly in '[...] basic and advanced vocational training [...]'.<sup>5</sup>

The most important provision for vocational education, however, can be found in Article 128 of the EEC Treaty, in which the Community agreed to create principles for a common policy in this field:

The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

The different approaches towards general and vocational education in the founding Treaties can be identified in the commitment to free movement of labour across the Community (Art. 48; see McLean, 1995, pp. 29f.), which played a dominant role from the beginning together with other economic objectives, laid down in the Treaty of Rome. Vocational education was seen as an instrument for enhancing economic integration.

Article 128 is included as the very last article in the chapter 'Social Fund', and its few brief lines do not give a sufficient basis to identify clearly the responsibilities given to Community institutions. There seems to be a contradiction between the aim of 'a common vocational training policy' on the one hand and 'general principles' as the basis of such a common policy on the other. The formulation of Article 128 did not fit into the system of policy instruments and decision-making procedures as provided in the Treaty.<sup>6</sup> This and other uncertainties justify the view of Fahle (1989, p. 83) who holds that

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<sup>5</sup> For lists of all the articles in the EEC, ECSC and the Euratom Treaty which refer to the different sectors of education and training see Fahle (1989, p. 20) and Moschonas (1998, pp. 12f.). For a discussion of the impact of these articles see for example Cludius (1995), Nowoczyn (1996) and Walkenhorst (1997).

<sup>6</sup> The system of policy instruments set up in the Treaty of Rome were very similar to those still in place today. Article 189 TEU lists Regulations, Directives, Decisions, Recommendations and Opinions as the