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Origins and Development

THE ORIGINS

From the Treaty of Rome to the Treaty of Amsterdam: the origins

The vocational education and training have always represented a sector of great interest for the Community since the birth of the European Union, which took place after the Treaty signed in Maastricht in February 1992.

In 1957 the Community was already interested in vocational training, when the Heads of State and Government of Italy, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands gave birth to the European Economic Community: art. 127 of the Treaty of Rome: the Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training. Upper secondary education in Europe - Art.149 of the Treaty of Amsterdam: The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States.

Concerning upper secondary education and education in general, on the basis of Art. 149 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States through a wide range of activities, such as promoting the mobility of European citizens, the design of integrated curricula, the formation of European networks, the exchange of best practices among the main actors in the sector and the teaching of the languages of the EU.

What is the role of the European Union?

The Community's role is not limited to simple harmonization of the decisions taken at national level, or to their mere "Europeanization": in fact the Community, through the adoption of numerous official acts and financing lines exclusively dedicated to the various sectors of education and training in Europe, contributes to:

- Harmonise national policies;
- Promote strategies of coordination and cooperation between training institutions and

European institutions;

- Foster the mobility of European citizens;
- Develop and support networks in Europe through the exchange of best practices;
- Implement integrated action plans promoting financial instruments to achieve them.

DEVELOPMENTS

From the White Paper (1993) to the Lifelong Learning concept creation: Strengthening of Education and Training policies in Europe

The **White Paper** on Growth, competitiveness, and employment (the so-called **Delors White Paper - 1993**) proposes a set of general guidelines for the growth and development focused on an open and competitive economy.

There are six objectives. One of these focuses on education and training throughout life, in order to develop the ability to learn, communicate, work in groups and to adapt the know-how and the training of workers. A goal that passes especially through the creation of the right to lifelong learning, a key theme of the dialogue at European level.

Green Paper on Innovation (1996): The objective of this Green Paper is to identify the factors - positive or negative - on which innovation in Europe depends, and to formulate proposals for measures which will allow the innovation capacity of the Union to be increased. Innovation becomes concrete through 13 lines of action, among these:

- Strengthening human resources for innovation through the development of initial and continuing education;
- Enhancing lifelong learning in enterprises, in particular SMEs;
- Recognize the skills acquired on the job, in working contexts;
- Creating closer links between the education system and enterprises; supporting the mobility of students and researchers within and beyond Europe, facilitating the relationship between Universities, research institutions and companies.

1996: The European Year of Lifelong Learning.

1996, apart from being the year of the publication of the Green Paper on Innovation, is also proclaimed the "European Year of Lifelong Learning". The key message is "never stop training".

The concept of lifelong learning will be one of the pillars around which the Lisbon Process will be developed, considered to be the focal point for the improvement of education and training policies in Europe, as evidenced by the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 which specifies that "the Community plays a fundamental role in promoting education in Europe: cooperates with EU Member States in order to develop a quality education promoting learning throughout life".

European higher education and the Bologna Process (1999): In 1999, Ministers of Education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration which aims to create a coherent and cohesive **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)** by 2010. The main objectives outlined in this statement were as follows:

- adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- establish a system of credits (ECTS)
- promote mobility by overcoming legal recognition and administrative obstacles

- promote European co-operation in quality assurance
- promote a European dimension in higher education.

Vocational Education and Training in Europe and the Barcelona European Council of March 2002: The meeting of the European Council in Barcelona on 15-16 March 2002 set the objective of making European Union education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010, and called for action to improve qualifications systems, transparency and cooperation at European level in the field of vocational training.

The significance of the Barcelona European Council is that it brought to the political level a process which had begun with the Directors General for vocational training (DGVET) at their meeting in Bruges, October 2001. The “Bruges initiative” aimed at creating a shared vision of how VET in Europe needs to be adapted and improved, if the Lisbon goals are to be achieved. Focusing on the principles of transparency and mutual trust, the Directors General agreed on the need for reinforced voluntary and “bottom-up” cooperation, working closely with the social partners.

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