

Romania and the European dimension of education and teaching

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Abstract

The study refers to the importance of teaching and education in the process of building a society of knowledge, this being the starting point in rethinking and developing the reform in the field, according to the European requirements. The changes that will occur will increase the quality of education at all levels, implementing the European standards on the Romanian tradition. It is widely accepted that education is the main vector of social and human development, it is the decisive factor for progress in a society and it works with individuals and communities as conscious and responsible agents of continuity in point of culture and civilization. Today, and more than certain in the future, education will expand the ultimate role of building a knowledge based society to cover a national, regional or worldly space.

Key words: *European dimension of education, self-education, lifelong learning, education for change, informal education, early education, formal education.*

There are signs of creating a knowledge based society and this type of society, in European common space, gets its value from all individuals' qualities, products of a complete education described by the UNESCO experts as *formal education* acquired by attending different types of schools, and *informal education* given by family, got in groups of friends or professional teams, offered by mass media or cultural institutions.

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Personal growth and social development of an individual starts with the educational influences others have on him/her – *hetero education*, continues with *self education*, self knowledge, self training and it goes to perfection and personal fulfillment during a process of permanent, continuous education, a lifelong learning.

Education and fully educated people represent the only way for Europe economic, political and cultural project to turn into a viable reality and European Union will appear as a model of a super state construction with its common market, super state democracy, national, intercultural and multicultural relations on solid ideas about acceptance and respect of national diversities, religious, ethnic, cultural or linguistic differences, being, at the same time, a good example of politics of security, peace, welfare and co-operation with non-European regions. Co-operation for common objective such as peace, security, progress, prosperity could be active and efficient only by formal, informal, non-formal education achieved according to an *European dimension of education* designed to promote unity in diversity in case of institutions, legislation, contents and methods to implement education as part of European culture and civilization at the same time regarding the non-European cultures and civilizations.

The European institutions which, through learning, teaching and education are to design the European dimensions, to apply unity in national, cultural diversities are: *European Council*, *European Commission Culture-Youth-Education*, and *Directorate-General for Education –Traineeship-Youth* in the European Parliament, the executive of the European Union.

In order to activate governmental involvement in educational policies and to respect diversity, European Council has declared *2007- European year of equal opportunities* and *2008 - European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* that marked series of debates on the ways to eliminate discrimination in education and to enlarge intercultural communication. The *conferences of the European ministers of education* organized under the authority of European Commission

disseminated the same ideas of the permanent necessity to provide equal chances to education. These sessions were about the right to a good education, about inclusive or intercultural education, about teaching modernization in point of content, methodology and specific ways of organizing this process. The implement of the European transferred credits system, the establishment of a national framework of qualifications fitting the European one, continuous education or national and international students' mobility are also subjects of discussion for ministers of European countries.

For similar purposes and for a direct motivation of the authorities to work for an improvement of human condition and for social inclusion, patronized by European Council and the Council of Europe, many propaganda campaigns were organized under different slogans: "All different all equal", "Let's make Europe with and for children", "Human beings are not for sale", "Stop domestic violence", "Europe, more human more inclusive".

Programmes were conceived and are in progress in order to consolidate the European dimension of education and to provide educational opportunities: *Comenius*(in pre-university system), *Erasmus*(for universities), *Leonardo da Vinci*(relating to vocational education), *Grundtvig*(relating to adult education). All these are parts of a general programme, *Socrates*, bridging activities at different levels of education with the aims of a *lifelong learning*, continuous education, all for a lifetime.

It is well-known the role of universities, open to the diversity of the world, with complex interdependence and having the mission of initial and continuous training of high level specialists according to the future demands of their professional domain, the scientific and technical research or the need to build new cultural values.

Bologna Process is the innovative movement to create *European Higher Education Area* that was launched after series of debates which conclusions are to be found in *Sorbonne declaration, 1998*, *Bologna declaration of 1999*, *Salamanca statement, 2001*. These documents, which Romania signed as

well, call for solidarity among European countries and their universities and for wide co-operation resulting in the creation, by 2010, of the *European Higher Education Area*, a strong point in building a society based on knowledge, a genuine standard of perfection. According to this process, modern European universities have to develop excellency, innovation, creativity, competitiveness and to reconsider scientific research so that *European Higher Research Area* could be added to *European Higher Education Area* as another strong point of a society based on solid knowledge.

Another innovative movement in education seems to be *Copenhagen Process* with a declared objective to enhance co-operation in point of the vocational education of high performance to reach proper standards in training and acknowledgement of the future architects of progressive values in culture and civilization.

The European dimension of education also means the determination of objectives, contents and methods to achieve- formally, non-formally and informally- a *new education*, these objectives being only theoretical answers with practical recommendations that UNESCO experts gave to the contemporary world challenges facing the globalization tendency. Therefore, they respond to variations with *Changing Education*, to war and violence they suggest *Peace and Non-Violence Education* and to intolerance with *Education for Tolerance*. Against undemocratic aggressions there is *Education for Democracy*, for the violation of human rights there exists *Human Rights Education* while to sub-development *Education for Development and Participation* is opposed. To stop alteration of the environment and personal life students could be taught *Education for healthy environment* or *Education for health*. A form of learning about what Europe is and what are its rules, objectives and policy is *Education for European values and European Integration*, etc.

The subject of Romania and other countries as part of integrated Europe finds it necessary to develop the European dimension of an integrate education

– formal, non-formal, informal- an attempt that asks for bridging all levels, creation and put into practice the educational and cultural policies to obtain, in the end, an European identity with national origins, to become an European citizen but not forgetting one's own nationality in a diverse world with complex interdependences but with common answers.

The European dimension in education is focused on two main directions:

A. *Wide promotion, consideration and proper conditions to have the fundamental right to education*, which means real opportunities for equal chances, general access to basic levels of education, personal development, inclusive education (relating to those who might be discriminated), multicultural and intercultural aspects, training for children and young people for the labour market, national and international mobility for students, continuous and qualitative education.

B. Creation and development of a performing high level education, open to diversity and interdependence and focusing on labour market that implies:

- redesigning the structure of educational system, of its types, profiles, branches to reach European standards but keeping the good traditions of the Romanian education;
- a new substance of the curriculum (plans, schedules, textbooks) having a perspective of a national values within the European ones;
- enabling a primary or university education taking into account each country premises for development in the general European requirements;
- the promotion of social inclusion by a socio-professional integration of the young;
- the combat of ethnic, linguistic or religious discrimination;

- an initial and continuous teacher training at high European standards;
- the use of European landmarks in teaching and education.

In fact, Romanian educational reform according to European perspective and trends is about:

- the elaboration of coherent legislation parallel to the European one in the domain;
- official guarantees for free access to all levels in education(primary, secondary, high school, university);
- the combat of any type of discrimination ethnic, racial, linguistic or religious
- enabling educational inclusion in schools and universities;
- institutionalized fight against illiteracy and work with the illiterate persons;
- measures for free guaranteed education at different levels;
- providing education units with modern materials and techniques;
- drawing of a new, more accessible, flexible curriculum;
- integration of national values within European context;
- focus on Romanian contribution to European values;
- decentralization of pre-university system;
- a natural translation from informative to formative teaching, from routine to creativity;
- improvement of evaluation methods;
- pupils and students motivation using a higher level of attractiveness in teaching and learning;
- different and individual teaching activities according to student;
- school equivalency, qualifications and jobs using the transfer credits European system.

Students' information and acquaintance with European demands is possible by including certain subjects or modules in their curricula which help them know and get informed about the values of European culture and civilization and about European institutions. The programmes have to provide the themes, the objectives and the resources of this particular approach while the textbooks are to be accessible, attractive and convincing illustrations of European Union patrimony values. Extracurricular offers in schools and universities- training programmes, real or imaginary trips, lectures, conferences, discussions, exchanges, festivals enables the assimilation of European values, strengthen the attitudes and convictions of belonging to the political, economic and cultural area which pupils and student develop and attach to their national feelings, being thus prepared to assimilate and live with.

The European dimension in education could be expanded due to the cultural institutions and mass media and, in from this point of view, the objectives are:

- evaluation and highlight on multicultural and intercultural European model, association of the Romanian one by mingled presentations of national and European values;
- free access to national values in culture and civilization, to Europeans ones with consideration for the non-European realities;
- full knowledge and understanding of national values in connection with the European ones;
- full knowledge and understanding of European values with appropriate consideration for the non-European ones;
- full knowledge and understanding of European Union values;
- full knowledge and consideration of European Union institutions;

- full knowledge of economic and cultural opportunities European countries can provide and learning how to get and use them;

Theatres, cinemas, radio and television, publishing houses, press trusts, show impresarios or travel agencies are the main vectors of cultural politics. Shows live, on radio or TV, trips and voyages, press articles are the most convincing and reliable methods to promote pan-European spirit.

But, speaking again about formal, institutional aspect of Romanian education, basis for life of the new individual, it is worth mentioning the permanent changing since 1990. The periodical evaluations in our education system brought out not only successful aspects but also the failures of the reform in education after radical changes. The intensive, uncontrolled use of different experiments in education during the years prevented us from applying good solutions which could have increase performance and give a note of quality similar to the European education system.

A presidential commission had a report *Romania-education and research* and got to the conclusion that *the Romanian system of education is inefficient, irrelevant, inequitable and of a poor quality*. The domains under study were legislation, content of education, ranking of levels, profiles and specializations, school duration and structure, teachers' performances, specific curriculum, evaluation methods and items, professional route, centralization of pre-university school system, gaps in dealing with disfavoured categories of students, lack of a proper financial support.

Here is a reiteration of the things to change or improve and of the recommended solutions:

- Early education relating to ante preschool level 1-3 years was completely neglected, though nursery centers subordinated to Health Ministry were in great number but with a major role to shelter and care than to educate. After adopting law 263/2007 regarding *nursery centers organization and activity*, apart from the initial facilities, education of

the small children and counseling for their families is mentioned, too. Because of the lack of specialized personnel, there was a decision for the creation of a national agency to draw the functioning lines, to select the teachers and to train them in post university studies.

- Pre-school level was under analysis because of its insufficient proper spaces and irrelevant plans and methods to work with children. The solution was to reconsider the activity and education plans and to change the approach in training the teachers.
- Primary school was also criticized in point of school spaces, teaching plans, textbooks, children missing classes or abandoning school. Many suggestions were made about building new schools and modernizing the old ones, a strict selection of teaching materials, a real flexibility of school plans, teacher trainings at a high university level, the mutation of the last year in kindergarten to a beginner, preparatory stage in school and a passage from 4 to 5 years primary school.
- Secondary school, grades V-IX and high school, grades X-XII-XIII was also minutely analyzed. For the first category there were problems in education plans and materials, length of terms/semesters, insufficient funds, central decisional power, evaluating methods, all these giving a high degree of absentees, and many pupils to abandon school. The solutions were to reconsider plans and teaching methods, to better select materials, to eliminate some exams which proved to have no practical finality, to change the salary scale for teachers and to have free, obligatory school for 10 years.

To manage in keeping children at school for 10 years and to eliminate school abandon and the great number of absences, to fight against discrimination and bad treatment of disfavoured students, especially of Romani origin, a lot of inclusive measures were adopted according to the *minister orders 1539 and 1540 from 2007* where the role of the school mediator was well defined and segregation was forbidden. Specialized persons were designed to

make children come to school, to keep in touch with their families, to have a permanent control over those risking to abandon classes and to work with the students with special needs or with different disabilities.

High school education was mentioned to have problems referring to the profiles and specializations to be studied, inadequate education plans and materials used by either students and teachers, disputable or doubtful training of some teachers, the huge mass of information to be taught and learnt, lack of school facilities. Some of the suggestions were a new consideration of profiles and specializations, another way to select didactic materials, more extra-curricular activities to provide a kind of “new education” with computers and modern lessons in class, with national qualifications to fit the European one and with a efficient management, but not omitting a modern graduation exam or different salaries according to everyone’s results.

Professional and technical education, which is the technical branch of high school system was under discussion because of its many confusing names for different profiles and specializations, because of the plans, materials and practical methods in evaluating the students. The general opinion was that rapid solutions need to be adopted in terms of the analyzed and criticized problems in order to have students whose diplomas and certificates can be recognized in Europe.

Education/Training after high school or non-university 1-3 years education was also in discussion because of the profiles, specializations, lack of European compatibility in point of qualifications and there was a suggestion to call this period ‘non-university tertiary education’.

Special education will get a new role and orientation, children and young people with different disabilities will be integrated in normal schools and will be part of the inclusive education. It is highly necessary that normal schools adapt to the special needs of these category of students, to change mentalities, to create new curricula and to focus on healing, fitting activities for the students with problems. There will be plans for each student, their parents will get

special conciliation and those having chronic sufferings will attend school classes in hospitals. Minors, teenagers and adults in re-education centers or penitentiaries, by the law, will also be included in the education system. As for the gifted children or young people who can have performance results in different domains, they have special conditions to study due to the National Center of Differentiate Education. Romania law offers guarantees that Religion will be studied in schools, existing classes for every confession in the country no matter the language or the method of instruction.

The high rate of illiteracy, absenteeism, school abandon among romani people led to the appearance of special programmes to have both children and adults in schools and all education levels have extra special places for those who want to attend high school or university.

Government was aware of those children whose parents work abroad and *HG 857/2007* was conceived for the *instruction and education of the children with parents abroad*. This document also mentions the foreign people temporary living in our country.

University education was in its turn severely criticized in the analytical report because of some universities without suitable didactic materials, don't have proper education and research activities to fit the required standards, offer no opportunity for labour market to their students and accept mediocrity. It was a reproachful reality that until 2007 no Romanian university had a place Shanghai top among the 500 best universities in the world. It appeared very clear that, in spite of the special human potential Romania has, well informed and highly specialized teachers and good working competent students, there are no visible results and confirmation abroad. Some accused the excessive traditionalism, others spoke about imperfect, faulty evaluation, slow implement and access to information, bad management and little involvement in obtaining European research grants offered by Romanian ministry or European Union.

A lot of legislative ideas were brought into discussion among which some could be mentioned: a new university law, development of classified

universities to universities with intensive research activity (License + Master' + Doctorate + Post - doctorate), universities for education and research (License + Master's), universities for education only(License), vocational universities(with flexible Master's in specific domains such as military, arts, sports). Other suggestions were to equalize diplomas and degrees, to increase the role of universities helping students to find jobs on the labour market, to develop their infrastructure and to financially support the research so that our university politics for specialized areas could integrate into the European system of high education. Students and teachers national and international mobility and permanent regeneration, the extended use of transferred credits, recognition of academic degrees and diplomas and of academic years are on the same list of ideas to put into practice. The quality in education will guarantee that a diploma could certify a good theoretical background for labour market, will make the student an active citizen able to continuously develop personal life.

Notable results can be mentioned if *Process Bologna* and its recommendations are applied to academic studies classified in license and post –license(Master's, Doctorate). Romania adopted Process Bologna in 1999 and has its role in the configuration of European Space for Higher Education. The culture of quality in education is ensured by some central institutions such as ARACIP- Romanian Agency for Quality in Pre-university Education and ARACIS - Romanian Agency for Quality in Academic Education.

To conclude, the reformation of Romanian education system has an European dimension in its objectives, contents, structure is a continuous process starting with the implement of the new legislation and a new status of teachers. – the project is still under discussion.

Pre-University Law, the Project of High Education Law, Status of Teachers, a proper funding of 6% of PIB will certainly produce major changes in Romanian education, will ensure progress in scientific research, will make school management more successful and will offer conditions for real, substantial transformations included in the project of the national pact.

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