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GREEK PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN LIFE LONG LEARNING AREA

Abstract

The present paper argues that the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy – in the context of the formulation of the European Lifelong Learning area, through the Open Method of Coordination – resulted in the expansion of the EU competencies into an area regulated, until very recently exclusively by the Member States – that is Compulsory Education. Accordingly, the paper aims at identifying the potential linkages between the policy priorities set at the European level and the respective legislative initiatives introduced by the Greek government in relation to Primary Education. Finally, it comments on the new roles attributed to the Greek PE in the context of the European LLL area.

Introduction

At Lisbon, in March 2000, the Heads of the EU Member States made decisions that have significantly affected European education and training systems ever since. Within a context characterized by upheaval resulting from globalization and the challenges of the new increasingly knowledge-based economy they adopted an optimistic, forward looking political discourse (Pepin, 2006, pp. 206-207) setting the ambitious task of drawing up a new economic, social and environmental strategy with the aim for the EU: “*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*” (Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, point 5). The Lisbon strategy represents a broad coherent strategy with an overall medium-term objective -2020- and a structured, newly introduced, method for action and follow-up (Pepin, 2006, pp. 206-207), the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC seeks to underpin the process of reform and change, with its success being largely dependent on the determination shown by the Member States in putting it into practice at national level (Pepin, 2006, pp. 206-207).

At Lisbon, in March 2000, education saw the development of Community coordinated strategies for greater convergence of national policies (through the Education and Training 2010 programme) along with employment (through the European Employment Strategy, ESA) and the economy (through the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, BPEGs). Accordingly, European education and training systems gained a new pivotal role in what concerns the renewed prosperity of the Union. What is more, the desire concerning the formulation of the European Life Long Learning (LLL) area in conjunction with the OMC provided the Council with both the context and the tools to design policies involving all types of education and training institutions in the Member States at all levels including

compulsory education¹, let alone all types of learning activities, formal, non-formal and informal.

At the same period of time, since 2000, education practitioners – mainly teachers and mid-level executives, at the Primary Education (PE) level² witnessed a number of developments concerning its structure, content of studies, their working status and initial and/or in-service training. In short, new types of Primary Schools have been introduced besides the conventional ones; new lessons have been added to the curriculum accompanied by innovative teaching methods with the use, mainly of ICT, while teachers and school principals do function in a completely differentiated context, in comparison to the period before 2000 facing a whole set of different challenges.

In this context, this paper investigates the relationship between the European policies (2000-2020) regarding LLL and the respective Greek policies at the PE level. Accordingly, after reviewing the recent developments at the European level, concerning, particularly, the formulation of the European LLL space it focuses on the legislative initiatives from the part of the Greek government regarding PE, with the aim to identify the potential linkages. Concluding remarks comment on the new roles attributed to the Greek PE in the context of the European LLL area.

The formulation of the European LLL space: Implications for the PE institutions in the Member States

The Feira European Council in June 2000, within the context of the Lisbon Strategy, asked the Member States, the Council and the Commission, within their areas of competence, to “*identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all*” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 3). Some months later, as a result of the public consultation that followed, the Commission published its Communication entitled “*Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*” underlining the determination on the part of the EU to converge European policies to that area³.

The EU, in line with the strategy adopted in Lisbon⁴ in 2000, envisaged, through the economical use of existing resources, policies and, of course, the OMC⁵, to establish an area, with global appeal, characterized by the free movement among different learning settings⁶, jobs, regions and countries fostering all social inclusion, active citizenship, personal fulfillment and, mainly, employability – along with all various other, related with the economy and the market, benefits of LLL (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 3). In fact, Member States, towards this end, agreed to develop and implement coherent and comprehensive policies incorporating all types of education and learning – formal, informal and

¹ Compulsory education was previously considered to belong exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Member States being directly related to the preservation of national identities.

² The main part of compulsory education in Greece lasting for six years.

³ It was actually the end of a process, which started in December 1993 when the Commission published the “White Paper on Growth, competitiveness and employment supported lifelong learning”.

⁴ The European Council of March 2005 reaffirmed the stance it had adopted on previous occasions, stating that ‘lifelong learning is a sine qua non if the Lisbon objectives are to be achieved’.

⁵ Mainly the Education & Training 2010 Programme.

⁶ As in contrast to educational ones.

non-formal⁷, at all levels “*from the cradle to the grave*” (Delors, 1996). They, thus, expanded their interest in the level of compulsory education and allowed for the design, the implementation and the monitoring of policies in this area to be made in European loci rather than the (sub-) national level, as was the case up until then⁸. In a few words, ever since 2000, within the OMC, the European Council, that is a European inter-governmental institution, decides on either policies and/or policy priorities incorporating schools at the level of compulsory education and the Commission, a supra-national institution monitors and reports on the level of implementation of these policies from the part of the Member States⁹ while the other European Institutions (the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice etc.) retain also their own special role in this process.

Particularly, a close inspection of European policy documents, since 2000, reveals seven policy areas where the EU focus has expanded to the level of PE:

- a. Basic Competences¹⁰,

⁷ References to LLL should be understood in the light of the extended definition adopted by the Commission in 2001: “*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 9). In 2004, CEDEFOP produced an alternative, definition for LLL, rather, emphasizing its results: “*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons*” while it also uses the term life-wide learning in the same context with the emphasis being laid on the learning settings: “*learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage*” (CEDEFOP, 2009, pp. 123-124).

⁸ It is the first time in the history of the European Policies in the field of education that a European Institution -even an intergovernmental one- may take decisions affecting education institutions at the level of compulsory education. In regard with the history of European policies in the field of education see also Asderaki, 2009; Pepin, 2006; Stamelos & Vassilopoulos, 2004.

⁹ In what concerns the present paper, the policy priorities regarding Primary Education Institutions in Greece should be looked up in the European policy documents of the past decade or so.

¹⁰ The 8 basic competences are: Communication in the mother tongue, in the foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in sciences and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal – intercultural and social competences and civic competence, entrepreneurship and cultural expression.

With regard to this policy priority see also:

- Commission of the European Communities 2002, Action Plan on Skills and Mobility, COM (2002) 72 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2005, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, COM (2005) 548 Final
- Council of the EU (2005), Conclusions on the role of the development of skills and competences in taking forward the Lisbon goals (2005/C 292/02)
- Commission of the European Communities 2006, Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Fostering Entrepreneurial Mindsets through Education and Learning, COM (2006) 33 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2008, Improving Competences for 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools, COM (2008) 425 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2008, New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and Matching Labour Market and Skill Needs, COM (2008) 868 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2009, Key Competences for a Changing World, COM (2009) 640 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2009, Key competences for a changing world, SEC (2009) 1598
- Commission of the European Communities 2010, An Agenda for new skills and jobs - A European contribution towards full employment, COM (2010) 862 Final

- b. ICT¹¹,
- c. Languages¹²,
- d. Mobility¹³,
- e. Education Practitioners¹⁴,

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- Council of the EU (2010), Presidency Conclusions on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative (2010/C 135/03)
 - Council of the EU, (2010), Conclusions on , Increasing the level of basic skills in the context of European cooperation on schools for the 21st century, OJ C 323, 30.11.2010, p. 11–14
 - EURRYDICE (2012), Developing key competences at school in Europe
 - EURYDICE (2012), Entrepreneurship at school in Europe
 - Commission of the European Communities 2012, Assessment of key competences in initial education and training - Policy guidance, SWD (2012) 371

¹¹ In relation to the particular policy priority, see also:

- Commission of the European Communities, 2001, The eLearning Action Plan – Designing Tomorrow's Education, COM (2001) 172 Final
- Commission of the European Communities, 2002, eEurope 2005 – An Information Society for All, COM (2002), 263 Final
- Commission of the European Communities, 2002, Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council adopting a multi-annual programme (2004–2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme), COM (2002) 751 Final
- Commission of the European Communities, 2006, Final Evaluation Report on eLearning (2004–2006)
- Decision No 2318/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 December 2003 adopting a multiannual programme (2004 to 2006) for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme), OJ L 345, 31.12.2003, p. 9–16

¹² Both ICT and Language Learning comprise two of the eight basic competences. They do, however, also comprise discernible policy areas where the EU has really focused. In what concerns especially languages see also:

- Commission of the European Communities 2003, Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006, COM (2003) 449 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2005, The European Indicator of Language Competence, COM (2005) 356 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2005, A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism, COM (2005) 596 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2007, Framework for the European survey on language competences, COM (2007) 184 Final
- Council of the EU (2011) Presidency Conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility, (2007/C 372/07)
- Commission of the European Communities 2012, Language competences for employability, mobility and growth, SWD (2012) 372

¹³ With regard to this policy area see also:

- Commission of the European Communities, 2004, Report on the follow-up to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community of students, persons undergoing training, volunteers and teachers and trainers, COM (2004) 21 Final
- Commission of the European Communities, 2006, The impact of COMENIUS school partnerships on participating school

¹⁴ In relation to this policy priority, see also:

- Commission of the European Communities 2005, Modernizing Education and Training: A vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe, COM (2005) 549 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2006, Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems, COM (2006) 481 Final
- Commission of the European Communities 2007, Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, COM (2007) 392 Final

- f. Early School Leaving¹⁵, and
- g. Quality of Education¹⁶.

In light of this information it is rather interesting to now focus on the Greek legislative initiatives referring to PE and identify the potential linkages with the EU policy priorities on the matter.

The Greek PE in the context of the LLL area

Within the last decade, many changes have been noted at the Primary Education level in Greece. These changes differ on their level of implementation due to various reasons – magnitude, economic effect, agreement at the local level etc. However, they all center on three main areas: a. the content of studies, b. the ways in which PE has been structured and organized, and c. the education practitioners.

In what concerns the content of studies in Greek PE, besides the traditional subjects, many of which such as Greek language, mathematics, science, civic education, have been retouched¹⁷, new ones have been added addressing, more or less, contemporary issues related mainly with the apprehension, on the part of the pupils, of the basic competences environmental education, arts, music. Particular attention has also been paid to ICT¹⁸ and modern languages¹⁹ with the aim being, in relation to the second, for the students to communicate in at least two foreign

- Commission of the European Communities 2008, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, COM (2008) 179 Final
 - Commission of the European Communities 2010, A New Impetus for European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to Support Europe 2020 Strategy, COM (2010) 296 Final
 - Commission of the European Communities 2007, Schools for the 21st century, SEC (2012) 1009
 - Commission of the European Communities 2012, Supporting the Teaching Profession for Better Learning Outcomes, SWD (2012) 374
 - Council of the EU (2007), Presidency Conclusions on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, (2007/C 300/07)
 - Council of the EU (2008), Presidency Conclusions on Preparing Young People for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools, (2008/C 319/08)
- ¹⁵ In relation to tackling Early School Leaving see also:
- Commission of the European Communities 2007, Promoting Young People's Full Participation in Education, Employment and Society, COM (2007) 498 Final
 - Commission of the European Communities, 2011, Tackling Early School Leaving, COM (2011) 18 Final
 - European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2011, Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU
- ¹⁶ With regard to this policy area see also:
- Commission of the European Communities 2000, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Cooperation in the Quality Evaluation in School Education, COM (2000) 523 final
 - Eurydice (2006), Quality Assurance in Teacher Education in Europe, Brussels: European Union.
- ¹⁷ The legislative initiatives concerning the updating of the traditional educational subjects are the following: MA 21072^A/C2/13-3-2003, MA 21072B/C2/13-3-2003
- ¹⁸ In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also:
- F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: The content of the educational subject of «New Technologies» - all-day Primary School (In Greek)
- ¹⁹ In what concerns the particular legislative initiative see also:
- F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: Teaching of the English Language from the third grade (In Greek)
 - F.12/773/77094/28-7-2006: Teaching a second foreign language from the fourth grade in all-day Primary School (In Greek)

languages by the time they finish compulsory education. Finally, the content of studies in Greek PE is, also, enriched by various projects funded either directly or indirectly by the EU via Comenius, eTwinning, the FP7, the European Social Fund and implemented by education practitioners in Primary Schools²⁰.

The ways in which PE has been structured and organized have also been affected in the last decade. Elementary schools are now considered part of compulsory education, in an effort to tackle early school leaving, while attainment is provisioned to last for two years. Additionally, all-day elementary schools and primary schools, with extended time-schedules, have been introduced²¹. Provisions have also been made so as to tackle low school attainment and consequently early school leaving of children with disabilities²², ethnic minorities and poor social backgrounds. Particularly, the Ministry of Education has introduced the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP), referring to geographical regions where the presence of ethnic minorities is intense and/or considered, mainly, blue collar. Within the various ZEPs in the country, Primary Schools or classes within them provide for pupils with disadvantages by the use of differentiated educational methods, ICT, extended time-schedule, tailor-made instruction and close contact with the family and the surrounding community²³. Finally, besides the conventional Primary schools, three new types of Primary schools with their own unique characteristics have been introduced. The first, Primary Schools with a Unified Restructured Educational Programme²⁴, incorporate new educational subjects, with the aim to enhance the apprehension of basic skills, lay emphasis on ICT and languages,

²⁰ The design and implementation of various educational projects as well as mobility projects -i.e. Comenius- in Greek PE is regulated by the following Circulars: 151158/C7/30-11-2012, 121118/C7/8-10-2012, 121118/C7/8-10-2012

²¹ Regarding the introduction of all-day Elementary and Primary Schools see also:

- Law 3518/2006
- F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: The Time-schedule of all-day Primary Schools (In Greek)
- F.50/76/121153/C1/13-11-2002 MA: Time-schedule, Programme of all-day Primary Schools – Content of Studies for the subjects of English, Theatrical Education, Dances, Music, Art, Physical Education (In Greek)

²² In this field see also: Law.3699/2008: Special Education and education of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs (In Greek)

²³ The legislative initiatives concerning ZEPs are the following:

- AF.821/3412R/15746/Z1/31-12-2010: Regulation of Zones of Educational Priority, admissions and tutoring classes (In Greek)
- F.12/20/2045/C1/10-01-2011: The Time-schedule of Primary Schools within Zones of Educational Priority (In Greek)
- YATY/809/101455/C1/7-9-2011: Regulation of Zones of Educational Priority, admissions and tutoring classes (In Greek)
- F.1TY/814/103114/C1/09-09-2011: Call for the introduction of admission and tutoring classes within ZEPs (2011-2012) (In Greek)
- F 1TY.930/118741/C1/14-10-2011: Incorporation of Primary Schools in ZEPs

²⁴ In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also:

- F.3/609/60754/C1/28-5-2010 MA: Appointment of 800 Primary Schools with UREP (In Greek)
- F.12/652/63838/C1 3-6-2010 MA: Clarifications about the 800 Primary Schools with UREP (In Greek)
- F.12/879/88413/C1/20-7-2010 MA: Teaching Methods – Content of Studies of the new educational subjects which will be incorporated in the all-day Primary Schools with UREP. Review and updates of curricula for the educational subjects of the all-day programme (In Greek)
- F.12/520/61575/C1/30-5-2011 Time-Schedule, Completion and amendments of F. 12/620/61531/C1/31-5-2010 MA, F.12/773/77094/C1/28-7-2006 MA

providing pupils with certification of acquisition of the relative skills and retain a differentiated time-schedule from the other Primary Schools. Digital Primary Schools, which are found in their pilot phase of implementation, as their name suggest emphasize the use of ICT in the everyday teaching practice²⁵. Finally, the third, Model, Experimental Primary Schools, pilot phase, address new methods of teaching, the use of various educational approaches, new educational subjects, the ways the school opens up to the surrounding community and the use of new institutions in relation to the school's internal organization, administration, hierarchy and management²⁶.

Education practitioners could not have remained unaffected by the various changes in and around Primary Schools in the last decade. First of all, the Bologna process has posed various challenges in relation to their University studies. Moreover, their in-service training needs have been multiplied the past decade culminating to their existent workload (Stamelos & Bartzakli, 2011). In addition, new roles have been added to their traditional ones also requiring attention and effort for example a Headmaster (responsible of the school's management), School Advisor (advisor on educational issues and responsible for the evaluation of teachers), project manager (eTwining, Comenius, projects funded by the FP7 etc.), teacher, contact person etc. Accordingly, the various attempts on the part of the government to implement a system of quality assurance in PE has provoked severe turbulences affecting education practitioners and the ways in which they respond to their duties depending on their position to the hierarchy and their responsibilities (Stamelos et al, 2012; 2010). Finally, a new profession, relative to education, seems to flourish in the last decade in Greece, probably all around Europe as well. The profession of educators in all formal, informal and non-formal educational services which have been developing all around the country aiding students acquire certifications of skills acquisitions in various, differentiated fields i.e. hair-dressers, bakers, car-mechanics etc, stands besides that of teachers both expanding the boundaries of the teaching profession in Greece along with the content of their pretensions towards the government and limiting its potential to satisfy them in their whole (Stamelos & Vassilopoulos, 2010; 2004).

In short, PE in Greece has undergone changes, differentiated in what concerns their level of implementation regarding the content of studies, its structure – organization and, definitely, its personnel. The focus of the changes seems to lie within the policy areas where the EU focus has expanded to the level of PE (basic competences, ICT, languages, mobility, education practitioners, early school leaving and quality of education). In this context it is high time to turn to the new roles attributed to the Greek PE in the context of the European LLL area and discuss on the challenges posed on both and its pupils.

²⁵ In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also: F. 97911/Γ1/31-8-2011 MA: Appointment of Primary and Secondary Education Schools for the pilot implementation of the new study-programmes (In Greek).

²⁶ The law regulating Model-Experimental Primary Schools is the following: Law.3966/2011 (In Greek).

New (?) roles for the Greek PE

Community cooperation in the field of education has changed considerably in the last fifty years. It now involves all education institutions addressing all ages and kinds of population promoting lifelong learning opportunities blinking the eye towards employability, mainly, and the economy.

In this sense, Primary Schools in Greece do adopt new roles away from their previous ones regarding, centrally, the socialization of the new generations of Greeks.

The emphasis on the apprehension of basic skills, especially to the point where they are linked closely to learning outcomes may significantly affect the content of studies in Primary Schools. Besides the relevant transformations in the content of studies involved with their acquisition, the ways which will be introduced for their certification along with the willingness to be related with the signage of the end of learning cycles -instead of the academic year- may also pose significant challenges to the very organization of studies in Primary Schools. Additionally, the potential that teachers have to implement various projects to their schools enriching their programme of studies while other schools follow the national curriculum may result in great variations in an education system where parents do not have the formal right to choose among different Primary Schools²⁷. To the same end, significant questions raised from that fact that at this point besides the conventional Primary School, three new types of Primary Schools have evolved. Nobody can seriously argue about, either the landscape in PE in Greece, or the role of teachers in it.

In short, the aforementioned transformations concerning the shift towards lifelong learning meeting with the needs of the market and employability hide a serious danger. Societies may comprise anti-social subjects seeking to serve only their own rights and best interests. Nobody can provide the necessary assurance that the majority of people in modern societies retain the willingness and/or the democratic culture to position themselves in the service of the interests of the society (Karalis & Balias, 2007, p. 17). Somewhere there lies the new role of Primary Education Institutions in the new context.

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²⁷ Though it is not the rule, behind the scenes, some parents do attempt to change their children's Schools using various tricks bending the relevant laws.

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