Review

The approach of Romanian education from the European dimension perspective

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The European dimension showed up in the language of the educational politics at the end of the eighties. At the beginning, especially in the context of the article no. 149 to 150 of the European Union Agreement, the respective dimension refers to the efforts of mutual knowledge, the exchanges and common projects realized by the educational unities from the EU countries. It was obviously seen in a European extension of the national politics, as a consequence of the auxiliary, that education and training were competences at the national level. The dimension was a supplementary characteristic of the national politics in the education field, equivalent to additional opening and cooperation.

Key words: European dimension, educational politics, national politics.

INTRODUCTION

The European dimension is a relatively recent expression which occurred from the educational politics field and was developed in the 1980s (Bîrzea, 1994). This concept was initially developed in a legal context (article 149 to 150 of The European Union Treatise), and the respective dimension especially involves aspects connected to mutual knowledge and aspects concerning the European educational common exchanges and projects. It obviously achieved an extension of the national politics at the European level, because as a consequence of the subsidiarity principle, education and training were specific competencies which were to be developed more at the national level. The European dimension, an expression which supposes much more opening, cooperation and tolerance, was a supplementary characteristic of the national politics on education.

Another important stage in the concept’s evolution was achieved in the 1990’s. This development was especially determined by the political exchanges and the philosophical, cultural, social and economical ones. Most of the countries in geographical Europe became members of the European Council (a paneuropean organisation, different from the European Union) (Bîrzea, 1994). The geographical extension brings an extension of the European dimension. It can be said that this moment marks the assimilation of the European dimension as a common finality of all the educational systems from Europe, marked by the three values which assure the identity of the European Council, irrespective of human rights, pluralism and the law state. In this stage, occurrence and development of the perception of the European dimension is built on the basis of assembly of the common values. Also, the idea of European identity, conscience and behaviour shows up. These are rediscovered and built on the basis of a common culture and patrimony, which is both a national and European one.

The third stage in the evolution of the ‘European dimension’ was consummated at the beginning of the millenium. The key moment was the closeness of the two perspectives (The European Union and The European Council), especially after the considerable extension of both organisations. The European dimension from the goal (to have) to actions (to do), becomes the way of ‘being’ of the educational systems. More exactly, especially after the Lisboa Council (2000) which proclaimed for the first time, education as an European politic, ‘the dimension’ was expressed by an intense cooperation. This developed an European aquis, in which the European educational projects were extended, the educational systems were reformed and a common legal context was created (Leclercq, 1993). The idea of a ‘European space for permanent learning’ leads to the
adjustment of the educational politics, structures and institutions developed at the European politics’ level, but this space was permanently created in all the European educational systems. It is right that not all the systems were prepared and the evolution was differentiated by the attitudes, reactions and behaviours at a political level, but also among the teachers, pupils and parents. So, spectacular evolutions of adjusting the educational politics showed up, especially at levels where professional (Bruges initiative) and higher education (Bologna process) were more involved in the market economy development.

Today, both the social and economical systems and the educational ones cross a crisis moment at the educational philosophy level to a conceptual level, and especially to the axiological one, which has an impact both on the educational finalities and on the level of other important educational issues, such as: curriculum, management, teachers’ training, etc.

So, the need for analysis, by researches and academical studies, of the European dimension concept in education showed up. Even at the European level, the educational politics documents which refer to this expression lack a base, structure, roles and impact, as many approaches on this topic are maintained at the rhetorical level. Of the forms without a basis or of the common tiring language from the European organisations level, an aspect which can be improved by structural approaches clearly achieved by experts in educational sciences, can present the conceptual explanations, implications and tendencies which can be developed in this field. It is obvious that the expression can be clarified in other activity fields and also in cultural, economic and legislative ones, but in the education field, the task is of priority and must be achieved sooner, especially taking into account the specific field.

We propose to define the dimension as a subject matter, to contextualise it in the Romanian realities and to analyse it with objective means. First, the European dimension of education has to be defined by values and content, and then proceed to a rigorous analysis of the Romanian educational politics.

This analysis was built on three perspectives:

1. The European dimension shows up and develops in the legislative context.
2. The European dimension interpreted at the educational finalities’ level.
3. The European dimension analysed at the curriculum level (knowledge, competencies and values).

The elements of the European dimension were found both at the Romanian educational politics level, legislation, finalities and curriculum level and at the concrete instructional-educational process achievement (trends of educational politics, legislative trends of compatibilisation, educational programmes which follow the achievement of the European dimension objectives, school documents which state the knowledge transmission, competencies training and the development of attitudes and behaviours on the basis of the European values’ aspect). In a legislative plan, there were permanent efforts of adjustment, taking into account the national peculiarities, but the elaboration and maintenance of a supple, flexible, mobile legislative frame for sustaining the frequent changes of the educational field is more impetuous, in order not to be necessary for each legislative act to be followed by modifications, addings, come-backs, completions, etc. When it is more than this, it should be passed-on from the elaboration of the legislative frame to its application so that it will favour civic socialisation, integration of youths with a civic conscience and a democratic citizenship, and permanentisation in new democracies of the culture based on European values (Bîrzea, 1996; Quermonne, 001). The European educational legislation should be elaborated on a national plan, taking into account this role, but not a wording one that stressed the ideas of offering the legal context, which will favour their achievement. At the finalities level, the elaborated documents at the level of Romanian educational politics follow the formation and development of the European identity and European conscience, thereby sharing the common values of the European civilisation.

To a conceptual level, we can differentiate the meanings of the European dimension as a tendency built on specific national elements that were formed historically, geographically, politically and culturally in Europe and in the same time, taking into account as pillars the common elements of the various national entities. To an educational level, the concept of European dimension can be interpreted as a finality of the education which represents the orientation of the educational politics in order to train and develop the personality according to the European values. The European dimension of education can be defined as a common trait of the European educational systems, and also as a common project which refers to democracy, pluralism and the intercultural aproach of the diversity. The European dimension is a reality which is continuously built on the educational act, and is achieved by educa-tional objectives, curriculum and strategies. It is a new experience to which all Europeans participate and live with it.

As a common project of the educational systems, the European dimension is not built from what all of these have differently (structures, curriculum, legislative frames, time organisation, etc.), but from what all of these have in common (values, experiences and common problems). As an attribute of the European identity, the European dimension represents a project that is based on values. Dadsí (1994). It is a concept, specific to the European space, and it refers to specific values, such as: democracy, pluralism and interculturality. It is a ‘cultural project’ where the alternance and diversity of cultures
assure the cohesion and the balance a nation needs. Europe is always a global, multinational project and a synthesis of four real European values.

**GERMAN FREEDOM, ROMAN ORDER, CHRISTIAN FAITH AND GREEK THINKING**

At the curriculum level, the European dimension represents an objective which is achieved by sending knowledge (by some specific disciplines, and of other disciplines, in an integrated, interdisciplinary manner), training of European competencies and education in the spirit of European values and norms. The knowledge which contribute to the new generation, endowing a European identity, is that elaborated by the integration of the topics referring to Europe in the education of the diverse disciplines (especially geography, history, civic education, foreign languages, etc.). As far as the 'competencies' that must be formed, practiced and developed from the European dimension perspective are concerned, linguistic, creative, managerial competences, assuming responsibilities, argumentation, essentialisation, abstractisation, using informational techniques (technical competences), etc., must be realized. The responsabilization and participation of the European citizens in education are used to cultivate cooperation, communication, empathy, tolerance capacities, etc.

The concern for building and achieving the European dimension result from the curricular documents of Romanian education (curricula, syllabus and textbooks) and also from the instruction situations' analysis of the opinions of pupils and teachers. From the analysis of the curricula, we notice that the disciplines that favour the development of the European dimension in the Romanian education are predominant (modern languages, history, geography, sciences, civic education, plastic education and musical education, which is optional for every level, abstractisation, using informational techniques (technical competences), etc., must be realized. The responsabilization and participation of the European citizens in education are used to cultivate cooperation, communication, empathy, tolerance capacities, etc.

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of communication with those that have the same age, concerns, interests and values. The pupils are used with some knowledge about Europe (culture, civilization, history, geography, politics and economy), European institutions, etc., but their assimilation should be systematic, actual and adapted to the knowledge need of the young ones.

In order to directly find out (not by observation, interpretation, etc.) from the educational factors (pupils and teachers) how the elements of European dimensions in the Romanian educational context are well known and realised, we applied two categories of questionnaires for teachers and pupils (Barthelemy, 1997). These were applied to high school pupils and teachers (who teach all the disciplines which focus on European dimension realisation) from secondary and high schools (Annexes 1 and 2).

The majority of the questioned pupils have a knowledge of two foreign languages. All of them had done a computer initiation and more than half of them visited a European country, so they directly met the traditions, habits, language, culture of other European countries. Other European competencies formed and developed by the pupils were noticed during the lessons: the capacity of collaborating with others, working with others in a team, accepting the value and opinions of others, arguing their own points of view, etc.

The questioned high school pupils appreciate that the most often met values are: truth, rightness and liberty; while the specific national values are hospitality, traditions and friendship; and the European values are: liberty, rightness and equity. The most proper discipline and even those realised through the European dimension are: foreign languages, informatics, history, geography and civil education.

The teachers’ answers to the applied questionnaires correlate to the pupils’ answers (that is, pupils’ answers to questions 9 and 10 correlate with those of the teachers to question 8, the pupils’ answers to question 13 correlate with those of the teachers to questions 9 and 10, etc.). There are also answers of teachers which totally differ from those of the pupils due to different perception of some aspects of the educational-instructional process (goals formulation, modalities of realisation, etc.), especially as the elements of preparation (designing) and realisation of the educational process (modalities) are concerned.

1. The formal education realised in school and also the efficient way for realising the European dimension in the Romanian education is considered by the teachers.
2. The fact that European dimension realises the best in Romanian education at the level of finalities is underlined by the answer of a majority of teachers who perceive European dimension as a political concept. It is important as the European dimension is to be shown at the level of educational politics and as a finality; but this must be found at the curriculum level and also at the legislation level as it fulfils the ideals.
3. The transmission of knowledge still remains important for Romanian teachers, then learning of foreign languages, and finally, forming of the European conscience in order to realise the European dimension.
4. The teachers consider that they systematically follow the achievement of the European dimension when compared to the pupils who opined that it is neither followed nor realised in Romanian education.
5. The most available instruments consider by the teachers to take the elements of European dimension are those with didactic character and especially the printed ones (as the training of the teachers from Romania do not allow them the easy use of electronic tools). At the level of initial training, there had been some interventions and meaning in the continuous training, while at the training courses, there was no computer initiation, but there were some transformations done to redefine some of the activities. As a consequence, the elaboration of some didactic instruments is followed by structures which do not have the goal of helping the teacher. Another reason for the absence of this European competence (to use the computer in education) is the lack of equipments, but also, there is ease of teachers’ conservative attitude where the material possibilities allow the computer’s acquisition. The best example is the endowment of some schools and high schools with electronic apparatus (computers, printers, etc.). From the national curriculum analysis and that of the textbooks, lessons and also from the questionnaires’ interpretations, it can be seen that the European dimension exists presently in Romanian education, especially at the goals’ level, both in formulating the educational ideal, the goals and general objectives, the framed ones, those of reference and operation and at the contents’ level existing in syllabus and textbooks. As such, it can be seen less in the realisation of itself in instruction activities. Here, the accent is on the education of values, then on the transmission of knowledge and less on the formation of competencies. Even in textbooks, the most frequent modality of realising the European dimension is the transmission of knowledge, and only then, it is about the forming of competencies, values’ transmission and knowledge. However, at the level of goals, the European dimension is best found in Romanian education. Therefore, existence of constant concerns for its achievement, focus more on the formation and development of the European identity by allegation of the European conscience. In order to achieve this goal, it would be necessary to work hard, as far as the information and transmission of knowledge about what European dimension means in Romanian education are concerned, and also as far as the education in the spirit of European values and the forming of required competencies in the European space are concerned.
6. As far as the transmission of information concerns in
the school should exist in research places with both printed papers and electronic library, it should organise circles and activities with a European educational feature every week. In order to organise these activities, the pupils would also be involved (to settle the issues, to gather documentation, to do portfolios, to buy research materials, etc.). Nonetheless, the decision educational factories should organise seminars and information actions for teachers.

7. Taking into account education in the spirit of European values, such as: truth, rightness, liberty, cooperation, solidarity, tolerance and competition, the teachers should offer real models of European citizens, and they should guide their activities according to their professional, social moral principles and rules, which encourage cooperation, help, responsibility, etc. The national values expressed by the questioned highschool pupils are those which they follow in their educational route, but one of them is not really expressed and specific to the Romanian people. Even the Romanian pupils consider that these values are specific to the Romanian people, but the Europeans judge them on the basis of other values, which are considered specific by them (hospitality, tolerance, the respect of traditions and habits). As far as competencies are concerned and as long as the labor market from Romania is appreciated, the diplomas, marks and certificates which do not express especially the abilities, but knowledge in Romanian education, will continuously focus on the transmission of knowledge, but not on training and development of competencies.

8. On the basis of the answers given to the two questionaires, we notice that there are elements of European dimension in Romanian education, in that some elements are built, others are in progress or are going to be approached more insistently (e.g. teachers’ training, equipment, the awareness of the local community, etc.).

Trying to identify, with the help of the questioned teachers and pupils, the most efficient didactic strategies concerning the achievement of European dimension, we see that the formal curriculum shows up the recommendation that ‘European dimension’ is better supported by the analysis and basic explanation, which help its assimilation as a personal construct and as a condition of the future European citizen (Tudorică, 2004).

The analysis of the in force curriculum at the three levels of achievement, respectively (the intended curriculum, the implemented one and the achieved one), shows some discrepancies which confirm the data obtained by IEA surveys. More specific, according to the communicated data, there are notable differences among what is recommended, what is taught and what is effectively learnt inside the European dimension. This conclusion is obviously available for other aspects of the curriculum, also. In order to remediate this situation, some recommendations are made, which can be available for other aspects of the curriculum as well. These data are more interesting as they are obtained with the help of teachers and are based on the systematic notes of the author.

Based on a systematic survey, in a field where the rigorous analyses are still at the beginning, we can see that a complex approach can be achieved, one in which the plan of educational politics and real achievements, at the level of institutions and processes are permanently confronted.

REFERENCES


Annexe 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS
The European dimension of education

Grade:

1. What kind of foreign languages have you studied - in school
   - out of school? (encircle)
   - English
   - French
   - Spanish
   - German
   - Italian

2. Have you had a computer initiation (typing a text, saving it, etc.)
   YES   - in the school
          - outside the school
   NO

3. Have you travelled to another (European) country? (encircle)
   NO
   YES   - the country………….(trip with parents, school trip, participation in school contests, olympics on disciplines, others……..)

4. The European education is achieved in (make a hierarchy from 1 - the most important; to 5 - the least important, following the order of importance for you): school_, school clubs_, trips_, internet_, others……._

5. Enumerate 5 values each that you consider as being national values and European values:

6. Make a hierarchy of the following values under their importance for you (from 1 to 5): truth_, right_, freedom_, tolerance _, solidarity _

7. Underline the European institutions that you heard about during the classes: European Commission, The Council of Europe, European Parliament, others (……………………..)

8. What are the disciplines where you heard about these?

9. What are the disciplines (you studied in high school) you consider as being the most proper ones in order to achieve the European dimension?

10. What are the disciplines (from those studied in high school) where the European dimension is achieved?

11. What are the disciplines you liked best among the following?

   - European Geography
   - European History
   - European Map

12. Which of them do you consider yourself to be better prepared at?

13. Which of the textbooks seemed to be for you a real instrument of European education?

14. Which of the textbooks contain the values from question no. 6?
15. You have travelled to a foreign European country. What could be interesting to you in that country (make a hierarchy following the order of importance for you):

- the history
- the culture
- the geography
- the language
- the religion
- the music
- the traditions and habits
- the food
- the politics
- the economics
- others ………..

Annexe 2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS
The European dimension of education

The taught discipline:………..
The level………………………

1. What was the context where you heard about “The European dimension”? (encircle)

(a) political
(b) social
(c) cultural
(d) I have not heard

2. What do you think “The European dimension of education” is? (encircle)

(a) cultural concept
(b) political concept
(c) philosophical concept

3. Make a hierarchy of the next elements of “European dimension” following the order of importance (from 1 to 3):

- the knowledge of European institutions (The Council of Europe, The European Commission, The European Parliament, etc.)
- learning of foreign languages
- the development of European conscience and European identity

4. What do you think is the most proper way of achieving the European dimension (make a hierarchy from 1 to 5 following the order of importance for you): school__, school clubs__, internet__, trips__, others__

5. Which of the ways appeal to you more often in order to achieve the European dimension?

6. At the level of teaching, does the school discipline follow the achievement of “European dimension” as a goal of education (encircle the variant you agree with):

- planned/organised
- by chance

7. Where do you find elements of “European dimension”? (encircle)

- school syllabus
- lesson plans and class activities
- scientifical works
- exam subjects
- evaluation grids.
8. What is the discipline where the "European dimension of education" is achieved? (encircle)
   - Romanian language
   - Mathematics
   - Physics
   - Chemistry
   - Biology
   - Foreign languages
   - Music
   - Physical Education
   - others

9. What are the chapters (sections) of the taught discipline where you can find elements of "European dimension of education" (Enumerate at least 2 chapters)?

10. In the textbook you use, can you find elements of "European dimension" in all the chapters indicated by you (encircle):
    YES
    NO

11. "European dimension of education" is achieved at the level of taught discipline by (make a hierarchy from 1 to 3 following the order of importance for you):
    - knowledge meaning the assimilation of information about Europe
    - values meaning the education for democracy, background, peace and cooperation etc.
    - competencies meaning the development of creativity, the capacity of problem-solving, etc.

12. At the taught discipline, you pay attention in a great extent – in the interaction with the pupils (encircle):
    - to the transmission of knowledge concerning Europe (European institutions, History, Geography and European Art)
    - to the forming of abilities, competencies in order for the pupils to act as European citizens (foreign languages, computer use, mobility, capacity of adapting to new situations, critical thinking, ability of solving problems, etc.)
    - to education by adhering to the European values.

13. Is it recommended to you to put into your lesson plans goals which follow the achievement of "European dimension" in your classes?
    YES
    NO

14. Do you consider that in your classes, you were able to achieve the "European dimension"? If yes, which are the components that allow you to achieve this (underline the variants you agree with): goals, contents, methods, evaluation.

15. Do you consider that it is necessary to introduce some elements of making consistent professional training of Romanian teachers with that of the European ones (underline the variant you agree with):
    - in the initial training or in the continuous one
    - at the level of contents, teaching competencies and evaluation competencies
    - others

16. The ways you have access to information concerning UE (European Education and European dimension) are through:
    - written papers
    - Internet
    - NTI (CD, video tapes, etc.)
    - television
    - others


17. Which are the most often ones used by you (enumerate the first three of them)?

18. The difficulties in achieving "European dimension of education" are (make a hierarchy from 1 - the most often met, to 7 - the most rarely met):

- Acknowledgement
- The endowment with didactic materials from schools
- Management of education at the level of school units
- Teachers' training
- Syllabus (instruments of school practice guide)
- Time available for the interaction with the pupils
- Others .............................................