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A European Area of Adult Education

The European Union and the Objective of a Learning Society

In 1844 the Danish clergyman Nikolai Grundtvig opened his first *folkehøjskoler* in the Danish province of Sønderjylland. 156 years later, the European Union's newly established action programme for adult education took its name from this illustrious person who was not only a famous poet, historian, politician, philosopher and theologian but who, in addition, is commonly regarded as the father of adult education. But times are hardly comparable and neither are countries; whereas in Denmark adult education seminars are still often introduced by the singing of one of the thousands of psalms and songs written by Grundtvig, the very term "adult education" is scarcely known in some countries of Southern Europe. Cultural diversity is a characteristic of Europe and this holds especially true for traditions in educational systems. Nevertheless, Europe is growing together and this affects the discussion on adult education from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. In this process, the European Union plays a crucial role.

1. How adult education came onto the EU agenda¹

What we have come to know today as the European Union (EU) was originally founded in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Even today, the EU's policies continue to clearly focus on industry, agriculture and the economy. Nonetheless, from the very beginning the founding fathers vision of the EU reached further than the common market. Robert Schuman was very clear on this when, in his famous speech of 9th May 1950, he opined that the foundation of the ECSC would "lead to the realisation of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace". In recent years, European officials emphasise that rather than a pure economic community, the EU was called to be a community of shared values. But these values do not fall from the sky and cannot be regarded as a self-evident heritage. It becomes ever clearer that each generation has to cultivate and actualise its inherited values in order to embrace them. This has to do with cultural identity and education. It is therefore coherent that these topics, albeit reserved to the competence of the EU member states, seem to play an ever more important role in the EU's policies.

The beginnings

Education is important in many more than only economic respects; but it is in view of its economic impact that it first came into sight of European politicians. Even in the early 1960s, the European Council laid down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy² but only a decade later were concrete steps taken by the European Community's ministers of education. It had become clear at this moment that for better co-operation in the field of education, one should start by better understanding of one another's education systems. Consequently, in 1975 the decision was taken to set up a *European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training - CEDEFOP*³ that was meant to contribute to the implementation of a common vocational training policy mainly by encouraging the exchange of information and by a comparison of experience. The common vocational training policy should above all "contribute to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market"⁴. Considering this distinctly economic perspective, it is remarkable that at about the same time (1974), European ministers of education clearly stated that "on no account must education be regarded merely as a component of

¹ Information on the EU's education policy as well as the documents whose references are quoted below can be found at the following webpages for example: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html, <http://www.cordis.lu>; <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex>.

² 63/266/EEC, 02.04.1963; Official Journal (in the following: OJ) 063, 20.04.1963.

³ 337/75/EEC, 10.02.1975; OJ L039, 13.02.1975. – "CEDEFOP" stands for: "Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle".

⁴ 63/266/EEC, 02.04.1963; OJ 063, 20.04.1963.

economic life"⁵. This broader perception probably led to the creation of the *European University Institute* (1972), with its mission to "contribute, by its activities in the fields of higher education and research, to the development of the cultural and scientific heritage of Europe, as a whole and in its constituent parts"⁶. In the 1970s, the formation of an information network on general educational systems in Europe was decided;⁷ this network took the name *Eurydice* and started to gather and circulate information on European education systems and policies in 1980.

First action programmes

It was also in the 1980s that the European Commission started launching action programmes to support initiatives and projects on training and education: *Comett* (1986-1989; 1990-1994) was meant to strengthen co-operation between universities and enterprises in training relating to technology, *Iris* (1988-1993; 1994-1998) promoted vocational training for women, and *Petra* (1988-1991; 1992-1994) supported the vocational training of young people. *Eurotechnet* (1990-1994) focused on the implementation of new technologies in vocational training systems, and *Force* (1991-1994) intended to support policies and activities in the area of continuing vocational training. Besides these programmes with their focus on improving vocational training (and thus: increasing employability), the programmes *Erasmus* (1987-1994) and *Lingua* (1990-1994) had a more general approach. *Erasmus*⁸ was introduced to foster student and staff mobility between European universities and promote co-operation between higher education institutions; *Lingua*⁹ was established to help improve the foreign language competence of European citizens. Of course, also these two programmes were meant to contribute to economic development in Europe, but in addition to that, they explicitly intended to increase the awareness of European citizens and to help develop the concept of a people's Europe. Thus in the early 1990s, the EU's perception of education already went beyond a mere "making fit for jobs". However, adult education as a specific discipline was not yet on the radar of the European Union.

As a professional discipline, adult education – drawing inspiration from the ideas of Nikolai Grundtvig, which of course have been further developed – tries to address the human being as a whole and with regard to all important aspects and realities of his or her life. Therefore, ICT-courses for elderly persons may be a topic for adult education just as workshops about civic responsibility or seminars on cultural or ethical questions. Adult education addresses adults from all professional, social or educational backgrounds and mostly offers non-formal, sometimes informal learning arrangements. It contributes to personal development, helps persons to get aware of their role and responsibility in society and supports them to acquire a broad range of skills and abilities. Without any doubt, adult education has an economic dimension and may be a means for gaining key-competencies that are relevant for the labour market. But adult education is not vocational training and its focus is not on preparing for professional life. That's why the EU-education programmes of this first generation did not apply to adult education.

An important changing came in 1995 when the programmes *Leonardo da Vinci*¹⁰ and *Socrates*¹¹ (first generation) were launched, both with a duration of five years. *Leonardo* now comprised all actions concerning vocational training, whereas *Socrates* was the new umbrella programme for general education. Remarkably enough, the financial volume of *Socrates* was larger than that of *Leonardo* (920 Million Ecu and 620 Million Ecu respectively). *Socrates* had three "chapters": the first one concerned higher education and continued the Erasmus programme; it also maintained the name of *Erasmus*. The second one was about school education and was baptised *Comenius*. The third chapter was a "horizontal" one and was itself subdivided into three "actions". The first action concerned the promotion of language skills and kept the name of *Lingua*, the second one was on open and distance learning, and the third one promoted the "exchange of information and experience". This third action of the third chapter of *Socrates* included five

⁵ Resolution of the ministers of education, 06.06.1974; OJ C098, 20.08.1974.

⁶ Convention setting up a European University Institute, OJ C029, 09.02.1976; according to the webpage of the institute (www.iue.it), the institute was created in 1972.

⁷ Resolution of the ministers of education, 06.06.1974; OJ C098, 20.08.1974.

⁸ 87/327/EEC, 15.06.1987, OJ L166, 25.06.1987.

⁹ 89/489/EEC, 28.07.1989; OJ L239, 16.08.1989.

¹⁰ 94/819/EC, 06.12.1994, OJ L340, 29.12.1994.

¹¹ 819/95/EC, 14.03.1995, OJ L87, 20.04.1995.

“measures”, one of which was the above-mentioned *Eurydice* network. The last of the five measures was, beneath other things, finally dedicated to adult education! It was designed to promote the European dimension of adult education and promised financial aid for projects developing this dimension namely for projects that would disseminate information and promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices. According to an interim report of the European Commission after the first two years of the *Socrates*¹² programme, *Socrates* “was received enthusiastically by the entire educational community in the 15 Member States and the three countries of the EEA. (...) There has been a significant increase in European co-operation, especially in the fields of school education, adult education (!) and in open and distance learning, where there was little or no organised co-operation at transnational level before.” More precisely, the European Commission’s final report on the implementation of *Socrates*¹³ from 2001 concluded in view of adult education that “2.7% of the Socrates budget was given over to this new action which has made it possible to open up European co-operation to extremely broad target groups beyond the school and higher education systems. (...) The huge potential of this action justifies the option of giving a major role to the new *Grundtvig* action in the second phase of the programme. This new action will go beyond the restrictive framework of adult education and will look at all formal and non-formal pathways of lifelong learning.”

Present situation

The success of *Leonardo* and *Socrates* led to the launch of a second generation of these programmes from 2000 to 2006. The budget for *Socrates II* amounts to 1,850 Million euros, which is almost twice as much as that of *Socrates I*. However, it must be taken into account that the duration of *Socrates II* is seven years instead of five and that the number of “programme countries” has risen from 18 to 31. In several respects, the structure of *Socrates II* differs from that of *Socrates I*. Most interestingly in view of adult education, there is now a specific “action” for it, which took the name of *Grundtvig*. It is one of the eight *Socrates II*-actions and on the same level as *Erasmus* (higher education), *Comenius* (school education) or *Lingua* (language learning). Admittedly, only 7% of the budget is foreseen for *Grundtvig* (27% for *Comenius*, 51% for *Erasmus*); nonetheless it is astonishing how much the importance of general adult education has become evident at EU-level during the last decade. The interim-evaluation report of the European Commission on *Socrates II*¹⁴ judges *Grundtvig* “largely successful” and points out that “of all the actions within the *Socrates II* programme, *Grundtvig* is the one which has been most innovative vis-à-vis *Socrates I*. *Grundtvig* is considered particularly relevant in view of lifelong learning that has become one of the key-concepts of European co-operation in the field of educational policies.

It might be for this reason that in the next generation of EU education programmes (2007-2013) *Grundtvig* seems to be further strengthened. According to a proposal of the European Commission¹⁵, the separation between vocational training and general education – i.e. between *Leonardo* and *Socrates* – shall be given up and a large *Integrated Programme for Lifelong Learning* with an overall budget of 13.62 Billion euros will be set up for 2007-2013. Beneath two horizontal actions, this programme would comprise just four specific sub-programmes: *Comenius* (school), *Erasmus* (high school), *Leonardo* (vocational training) and *Grundtvig* (adult education). However, when a closer look is taken at these proposed figures, it becomes clear that adult education is still not considered as being of the same importance as the other educational sectors: only 3% of the budget is foreseen for the *Grundtvig* programme, whereas *Erasmus* would get 40%, *Leonardo* 25% and *Comenius* 10%.¹⁶ But as the *Integrated Programme* and its budget are not yet decided, it is meaningless to speculate about its details. Anyway, it is still fairly astonishing that *Grundtvig* is now to be one of four pillars of a large *Integrated Programme* for education and training when one considers that

¹² COM(97)99, 14.03.1997.

¹³ COM(01)75, 12.02.2001.

¹⁴ COM(2004)153, 08.03.2004.

¹⁵ COM(2004)156, 09.03.2004.

¹⁶ Thus, the percentage of the budget foreseen for adult education would be smaller than today: Within the actual *Socrates II* programme, it is 7%, which yields 4.3% of the total educational budget (*Socrates II* (1,850 Million euros) plus *Leonardo II* (1,150 Million euros)). In total figures, things look better: from 2000-2006 about 130 Million euros account for *Grundtvig* (7% of 1.85 Billion euros); for 2007-2013 it would be about 410 Million euros (3% of 13.62 Billion euros) – more than three times as much! However, as by now (July 2005) there are still big question marks behind the budget proposed by the European Commission.

ten years ago, adult education was only mentioned (firstly!) in the frame of a small sub-sub-subsection of the *Socrates* programme.

2. *Towards a Common European Educational Area*

However, the EU-action programmes are only one part of the story. The other one is what must *not* be called “European education policy”. The principle of subsidiarity guarantees the EU-member states full responsibility and competence for the organisation of their education system and the content of teaching. The EU, as such, has a very restricted competence in this field; it is mainly based on articles 149/150 of the Treaty Establishing a European Community¹⁷. Therein, the EU’s role is defined as contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their actions. The main purpose of this is to develop the European dimension in education, encourage mobility and promote co-operation. The EU has no competence in striving for a “common European education policy”. Nonetheless, it is obvious that in today’s European context, the education policy of each of the EU-member states is subject to many influences that are beyond their respective jurisdiction. At the same time, matters of education and research, and information and communication are of utmost importance for all European societies, as they want to keep up with the modern developments in a globalised world. The EU therefore started to not only fund educational projects through its action programmes but also to deliberate on how to meet, at the European level, today’s challenges for developing modern educational policies.

White paper 1995

The European Commission’s White Paper on “Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society”¹⁸ of 1995 may be regarded as a starting point. The white paper examines education and training in the context of employment and economy, stressing that this shall “not mean reducing them simply to a means of obtaining qualifications”. Nevertheless, within the white paper, the perspective is restricted and addresses education and training above all as “the latest means for tackling the employment problem” and as “one of the conditions for the development of a new model of more employment-intensive growth.” Adult education is only mentioned marginally. The term of “life-long-learning” is also not very prominent in the white paper, even if the concept of a “learning society”, which plays an important role in the document, is very much related to the idea of “life-long-learning”. The white paper provoked a large debate on the place of education and training in tomorrow’s Europe. This debate additionally benefited from the fact that 1996 had been declared the “Year of Lifelong Learning” by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. In the follow-up to the white paper, the European Commission laid down¹⁹ what can be called the foundations for the concept of a “Europe of knowledge”, for which these three dimensions would be characteristic: “helping the employability and adaptability of young people and workers; boosting knowledge potential; and helping to build a People’s Europe”²⁰. In any case, the “building of an open and dynamic European educational area”²¹ was now on the agenda.

Lisbon 2000:

The next turning point was the Lisbon Summit in March 2000 at which the “new strategic goal” was set out to “become (by 2010!) 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”.²² Obviously,

¹⁷ The summit of Maastricht (1992) recognized education as a legitimate area of EU responsibility in introducing these two articles in the European Treaty (as art. 126/127). Since the treaty of Amsterdam (1997), these articles have the numbers of 149/150. In the draft for a constitutional treaty proposed by the European Convention, these articles are integrated as art III-282/283.

¹⁸ COM95(590), November 1995.

¹⁹ In its three communications: COM(97)256, 29.05.1997; COM(97)563, 12.11.1997; COM(99)750, 10.01.2000.

²⁰ COM(99)750, 10.01.2000, p.4.

²¹ COM(99)750, 10.01.2000, p.4.

²² Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, presidency conclusions, number 5.

education was to play a key role in achieving this goal and the EU's ministers for education were asked to "undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems"²³. The fruit of this reflection was a report²⁴ and a concrete work programme²⁵ (Feb 2002) in which the Education Council and the European Commission jointly requested that "the Education and Training Area now be explicitly recognised as a key priority domain in the Lisbon strategy"²⁶. They promised that by 2010, "Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions"²⁷. For this purpose, three "strategic objectives" (with 13 associated concrete objectives) were set out for the education and training systems in Europe: improving their quality, facilitating access to them, and opening them up to Europe and the wider world. This work programme is mostly referred to as the *Education & Training 2010 Programme*. It is meant to constitute the first coherent Community strategic framework of co-operation in the fields of education and training, and gives a sort of umbrella for all corresponding European actions. *Education & Training 2010* has quite an integrative approach; it does not focus on special parts of an educational system – for example on adult education - but aims to improve it as a whole and at all fronts by proposing a comprehensive strategy from vocational training to general education and from school to university learning.

"Transparency" of the different national systems, "recognition" of diplomas, and "mobility" of teachers and learners figure among its important fields of action. However, the underlying idea and the guiding principle of all these deliberations on educational policy is the *concept of lifelong learning*. A first definition of "lifelong learning" was given by the European Council in 1994: " 'lifelong learning' means lateral co-operation between the fields of training as well as measures concerning the continuity of training throughout life."²⁸ This concept, still very much restricted to vocational training, has developed considerably since then. After the "Memorandum on Life Long Learning" (2000)²⁹ from the European Commission, a Europe-wide debate took place which resulted in the Commission's communication "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality"³⁰ and in a Council resolution on life-long-learning³¹. In these texts, "lifelong learning" has taken on a very broad meaning; it is now understood to include "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." This means first of all that lifelong learning comprises the whole range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activity, - in particular both, vocational training and general education. Secondly, life-long learning is indeed meant to reach from pre-school to post-retirement. Thirdly, the themes and contents of lifelong learning are very broad; at least they comprehend the four dimensions of personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability – including spiritual and cultural dimensions of learning, which are explicitly mentioned in the Commission's communication³². It is obvious that on the one hand, adult education fits perfectly into this concept; one could say that the importance of adult education – i.e. mostly non-formal or informal learning activities without explicitly aiming to improve professional skills – is officially recognised by this concept of lifelong learning. On the other hand, adult education is not, as some still suppose, just another (perhaps old-fashioned) word for "lifelong learning" but only a small and, at least economically spoken, minor part of it. One might therefore be suspicious about whether the specific needs of adult education are not shrouded in the overarching concept of lifelong learning.

One word must be said about how all the objectives for improving Europe's education systems should be realised. As the need for European co-operation seems obvious but the EU has no competence in this sector, a new "*method of open co-ordination*" was introduced, again by the Lisbon Summit in 2000³³. It is

²³ Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, presidency conclusions, number 27.

²⁴ EDUC23, 5980/01, 14.02.01; the report is based on the Commission's report COM(2001)59, 31.01.2001.

²⁵ OJ C142, 14.06.2002.

²⁶ OJ C142, 14.06.2002, p. 3, p. 4, p. 5.

²⁷ OJ C142, 14.06.2002, p. 3, p. 5.

²⁸ 94/819/EC, 6.12.1994; OJ L340, 29.12.1994, Art. 2 c).

²⁹ SEC(2000)1832, 30.10.2000.

³⁰ COM(2001)678, 21.11.2001.

³¹ OJ C163, 27.06.2002.

³² COM(2001)678, 21.11.2001, p. 9.

³³ Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, presidency conclusions, number 7.

based on the common identification by the education ministers of EU member states, of areas of activity and a definition of the related objectives that shall be attained. The member states are then free to develop measures and policies so as to progress towards these objectives whilst also giving regular reports which are compared according to indicators that were fixed beforehand. Working groups have been established since 2001 by the European Commission to support and monitor the implementation of the objectives at the national level and to develop suitable indicators and benchmarks. By that means, innovation, co-operation and dissemination of “best practices” shall be stimulated within the EU but with a non-authoritarian and only mediating role of the EU’s institutions.

On the way to a new start for the Lisbon strategy

Concrete steps were taken for the implementation of *Education & Training 2010*. In May 2003, the European Council decided on five benchmarks for education and training³⁴ and fixed five goals to be reached by 2010: the number of early school leavers shall decrease (1), whereas the number of graduates in sciences and technology (2), the proportion of persons with upper secondary education (3) and the literacy-level of youngsters (4) shall increase. The fifth goal might indirectly concern adult education: “By 2010, the European Union’s average level of participation in Lifelong Learning should be at least 12,5% of the adult working age population (25 to 64 age group).” However, it is unfortunate that the reason for this goal – entitled “lifelong learning” – only refers to the necessity of individuals to “maintain and improve their position in the labour market”. Furthermore, it is somehow irritating that lifelong learning here seems to apply to the working population only. This is a step back from the understanding already achieved on lifelong learning and reflects the narrow economic perspective on education of this document.

However, already by the end of 2003 it had become clear that there had been little effect of the EU’s Lisbon Initiative on the education systems. The Commission felt prompted to a “wake-up call” in order to preserve “a chance of making the Lisbon Strategy a success”³⁵: “The reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges and their current pace will not enable the Union to attain the objective set. The five European benchmarks adopted by the (Education) Council in May 2003 will for the most part be difficult to achieve by 2010”. The joint report³⁶ of the (Education) Council and the Commission for the European Council in spring 2004 went in the same direction. It pointed out the importance of education and training for the European economy and therefore claimed a “rightful place” for *Education & Training 2010* within the overall Lisbon Strategy. Whilst stressing the importance of establishing “a Europe of education and training” and repeating the intention of “making lifelong learning a concrete reality”, the text remained vague about adult education in a precise sense. This was also due to limited and hardly comparable data available on adult education in Europe. The lack of data on adult education was also deplored by the European Commission in its working papers on indicators and benchmarks from 2004³⁷ and 2005³⁸. To remedy this situation, the Commission announced an “Adult Education Survey - AES” which shall be implemented by EuroStat in 2006. This survey is indeed highly needed and will hopefully give a good base for further initiatives to support and develop adult education in Europe – and (hopefully!) prove with some “hard figures” the importance of adult education within the education systems and its – also - economic impact.

By the end of 2004, the Lisbon Strategy as a whole was put into serious question, when the so-called Kok-report³⁹ stated that its “targets will be seriously missed” and attributed this “disappointing delivery (...) to an overloaded agenda, poor co-ordination and conflicting priorities (and) the lack of determined political action”. As a consequence, the new European Commission under José Manuel Barroso proposed a “new start” for the Lisbon strategy⁴⁰: it shall now be strictly focused on the two priorities of economic growth and more employment. The European Council affirmed this new start but still stressed that the *Education & Training 2010* work programme should be continued, that “lifelong learning is a *conditio sine qua non* if the

³⁴ Council Conclusions of 05.05.2003; OJ C134, 07.06.2003; based on COM(2002)629, 20.11.2002.

³⁵ COM (2003) 685, 11.11.2003, p.4.

³⁶ 6905/04 EDUC 43, 03.03.2004, OJ C104, 30.04.2004.

³⁷ SEC(2004)73, 21.01.04.

³⁸ SEC(2005)419, 22.03.2005.

³⁹ Facing the challenge. The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment. Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Nov. 2004.

⁴⁰ COM(2005)24, 02.02.2005.

Lisbon objectives are to be achieved”, and that “the European education area should be developed.”⁴¹ As yet it is not quite clear what this really means. In any case, it is not education experts but economists who will be in charge of the management of the Lisbon Strategy. Obviously, economic performance is important for Europe and the concentration of the new Lisbon Strategy on “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” (this was the title of a first Kok-report in 2003⁴²), may be reasonable and necessary. Nevertheless, for the special concerns of adult education, which does not directly focus on qualifying for the labour market and which, in some member-states, is not a tangible part of the formal education system, this new Lisbon Strategy does not seem very promising.

Comment

All in all, one can ascertain that education policy in the EU attracts more and more attention. There are still many obstacles on the way towards realising a European education area, but there is no other way to go. When focusing on adult education, mixed impressions remain: in the EU action programmes which are the main instruments of EU-education policy (although the employment of this term is forbidden), adult education has undeniably and remarkably gained in importance over the last decade. In other policy documents, adult education is seldom mentioned; of course it is somehow part of lifelong learning that has become a concept “très à la mode”. But the definition of lifelong learning is so wide that adult education in a precise sense runs the risk of being overlooked. A particular reason for this is that its direct economic impact is not as obvious as for other education and training activities; yet, one easily gets the impression that the main concern of European policy is economy.

It is for sure that a prosperous economy is an important basis for democracy and civil society, for justice and freedom, and for a good educational system. But the arrow points into both directions: A modern economy is also dependent on an open and modern society, on civic engagement, on motivated researchers and good educational systems. To just say “it’s the economy” would be as foolish as to claim “it’s all education”. However, it remains true that education and more special: adult education contributes to a living culture and society, to a spirited civic engagement and to the personal fulfilment of citizens. This is much more than economy. But it also contributes to and gives a basis for economy.

3. A European “community of adult educators”?

Without any doubt, the EU – mainly through the *Grundtvig* programme – has an increasing influence on adult education in its member states and beyond. For some countries like France, this programme can even be regarded as an important incentive to develop professional activities and structures for adult education. For nearly all EU countries it holds true that *Grundtvig* provided an important impetus for co-operation with adult educators from other parts of Europe. Nevertheless, there are actors other than the EU who promote adult education throughout Europe. Analysing their structures and their policies is beyond the scope of this article; however, some of them shall at least be mentioned.

International bodies and networks

The *Council of Europe* is in many respects committed to questions of education and also runs education programmes. Whereas its focus seems to be on co-operation in the area of higher education, the themes set by the Council of Europe – for example education for democratic citizenship, intercultural education, and lifelong learning – are also of interest for adult education. The same holds true for the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD); again, adult education is not its focus but OECD is concerned with education and works on issues like lifelong learning, evaluating the outcome of education, social cohesion and education, and building new futures for education, which are also important in an adult educator’s view. Another influential international body is the UNESCO who has its own UNESCO *Institute for Education* (UIE) in Hamburg/Germany which is dedicated to literacy, non-formal education, adult and

⁴¹ European Council, 22./23.03.2005, presidency conclusions; 7619/1/05 REV1 CONCL1.

⁴² Jobs, Jobs, Jobs. Creating more employment in Europe. Report of the employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok, Nov. 2003.

lifelong learning. While this institute explicitly specialises in adult education, its geographic scope is larger than Europe. However, its work is also highly relevant for the development of adult education in Europe. Beside these international bodies, European networks of adult educators are probably the most important actors to promote adult education in an international context and to create transnational co-operation. Here, the *European Association for the Education of Adults* (EAEA) must be mentioned first. EAEA is a transnational, non-profit association whose purpose is to link and represent European organisations which are directly involved in adult learning. Its focus is NGOs whose principal aim is the education of adults. Originally known as the European Bureau of Adult Education, it was founded in 1953 by representatives from a number of European countries. Today the association is made up of some 100 organisations in 34 countries - from Cyprus to the Nordic countries and from Iceland to Russia. EAEA is a member of the *International Council for Adult Education* (ICAE), founded in 1973, which is a worldwide umbrella for adult education organisations. Beside EAEA, there are at least two other umbrella organisations for adult education in Europe: one of them is the *European Federation for Catholic Adult Education* (FEECA). Founded in 1963, it is a European platform for the mutual exchange of Catholic adult education organisations, which seeks to give them a voice on an international, European level. It has members from eleven European countries. The *Ecumenical Association for Adult Education in Europe* (EAEE) is the FEECA's protestant counterpart and links protestant adult educators from some 17 countries. Other more informal networks have emerged during the past few years, often as results of international projects. Within the EU's Grundtvig-4 action, several theme-centred European networks were established, for example on the education of elderly, on consumer education, or on democracy and human rights education. The partnerships from these networks often remain even after EU-funding has expired. Moreover, there are numerous adult education centres or organisations which have very rich, broad and long-dating co-operation with colleagues from other European and non-European countries.

Adult education: go Europe!

Despite these encouraging aspects, it remains true that especially for the sector of adult education the "Common European Educational Area" is still far from being realised. This might be due to the fact that adult education centres are not in an internationally competitive situation such as universities, are not as visible for the wider public as schools are, and are not so close to the economic world as vocational training institutions. Moreover, adult education centres mostly target a local or a regional public and they often work with volunteers⁴³. The consequence is that even at national levels, there hardly exists a "community-feeling" among adult educators. In some European countries, even the professional profile of "adult educator" remains vague. Of course, when the situation in different European countries is different, this is also due to divergent cultures and learning cultures. This cultural diversity shall be maintained. Nevertheless, one might wonder if the professional standards of adult education within each country – formation of adult educators, themes and methods, quality-management etc. – could not be exposed much more to the experiences in other countries. The aim should not be to get a uniform system of adult education throughout the whole of Europe. But it should become part of the professional evidence for an adult educator to be – at least roughly – aware of the working methods and quality criteria of his colleagues in Europe.

The PISA-study was a signal for schools to become competitive and to learn from the experience in other countries. The Bologna Process stands for convergence towards a European area of higher education. The Bruges-Copenhagen process tries to increase co-operation in vocational education and training. All these initiatives are up and running. It would be short-sighted to think that adult education could shirk this development towards a European educational area. But a European educational area is nothing pre-determined; if taken as a challenge and occasion to improve professionalism and quality of adult education, it could be a great chance for adult educators. They could benefit a lot by learning from the experiences of their colleagues in other parts of Europe. The way towards a European "adult education community" might

⁴³ According to the annual report 2004 of the Forum katholischer Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich, the biggest provider of adult education in Austria, 14,839 volunteers have been working for its member organisations in 2004, 7,943 persons held a part-time-position and only 484 persons were fully employed for adult education – 196 of them were pedagogues.

still be arduous. But important steps have already been made. And following this way also means contributing concretely to the Europe of shared values that is so much spoken about.