

## Briefing Paper on the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")

This paper is an introduction to the main document of the European Union for European cooperation in education and training: "ET 2020", which updates the first framework that was established in the context of the Lisbon strategy. It reinforces the conviction that the provision of excellent and attractive education will help the European Union to achieve its objective of becoming a world-leading knowledge economy. This briefing paper, prepared by the CSC Working Group on Education, should enable Member Churches of CEC and associated organizations to understand this political initiative and lead them to engage in dialogue with the political institutions about what is needed to provide a complete and, as the poet John Milton phrased it, a 'generous' education. The Working Group presents this paper as a way of informing and involving churches in a crucial debate at a European level on a matter which is becoming increasingly important for national education systems.

### Introduction

Against the background of the decision of the European Council in 2000 to make the European Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" the European Union has developed more and more activities concerning education and training. These measures will have a decided impact on the national education and training systems (Europeanisation of education).

A number of activities have been launched since 2000 to improve the national education and training systems. Indicators and benchmarks have been established for better quality and outcomes in education.

In 2009, the Council drew up the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training ("ET 2020") and now the Council of the European Union has agreed on a new European strategy "for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: 'Europe 2020'".

There is a reference to the Lisbon strategy, adopted in 2000 by the European Council, since when education and training have been seen as integral parts of the movement towards European integration. The aim is primarily to support the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU-level tools and the exchange of good practice. The main instrument is the Open Method of Coordination, OMC, a non-binding mechanism which promotes common aims, benchmarks, regular reports, and peer review.

#### The Strategic Framework ("ET 2020")

- *takes into consideration the development since the Lisbon Council in 2000,*
- *reiterates the general aim that Europe should become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, and*
- *provides elements for a renewed strategy for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020.*

## CSC Education Strategy

One part of the Education Strategy, adopted by CSC, is to examine the document ET 2020 and the related processes so as to enable the member churches to engage in possible action in their national context. Before the aims of the CSC strategy are presented and commented on, a summary of the ET2020 document is given. The text of the document is available at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm)

*“The Open Method of Coordination OMC is a policy instrument based on three main pillars: (1) common definition of objectives, (2) common definition of instruments and monitoring measures, and (3) exchange of best practices, peer review and mutual learning. There are no sanctions associated with not fulfilling the objectives, and thus it is considered as a 'soft law' approach.”* (Villalba, E. (2008)

Investigating the Discourse on Social Cohesion in Relation to Innovation through the Vocabulary of European Commission's Communications. In: European Educational Research Journal 7 [3], p. 360)

### Aims:

- To raise awareness among member churches and associated organisations of CEC of crucial political developments;
- To encourage them to contribute to the process of a Europeanisation of education;
- To lobby national governments concerning the concept of education;
- To take account of ET 2020 as the central document from the European Union that puts education and training at the centre of a long term strategy of European integration, and 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'.

## Why is this document important for the churches?

The document is an example of a paradigm shift in European Education Policy. The area of education and training has become an integral part of the further development of the EU.

The context for the educational activities and contributions to national education systems varies greatly from country to country and church to church. Minority churches are often faced with issues and problems because of the dominance of the majority church and they may find their contribution to public issues is ignored.

Majority churches often have a say in education as providers and are seen as an important part of civil society.

## What are the main messages of the document?

Selected quotes underline the main messages of the document. The first message is that education matters for European integration:

**“Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe’s strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal fulfillment, social cohesion and active citizenship”**

The document is based on a comprehensive concept of education that is introduced in *two general aims* and in *four strategic objectives*.

The **general aims** for further development of education and training systems in Member States are:

1. **The personal, social and professional fulfillment of all citizens;**
2. **Sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.**

These two aims provide a comprehensive *overview* of education, although indicators are needed to assess the effectiveness of European Education Policy.

They are specified in the four long-term **strategic objectives** for the EU education and training policy which are:

- **Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;**
- **Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;**
- **Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;**
- **Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.**

These aims partially reflect the purposes of church activities in education.

A key concept of the education policy is to promote a lifelong learning perspective. In the document the following definition is used:

**“Lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult education.”**

**The churches’ perspective:** The concern of church education has been generally more oriented towards “learning for life”. Church education promotes a specific perspective of lifelong learning, which is not only directed towards technical and professional competences and skills but also towards personal fulfillment, the arts, creativity, ethical, religious and other existential issues. Churches endorse and underwrite a holistic concept of education.

## **Proposed working methods for European cooperation in the document:**

- Work cycles each covering three years
- Priority areas for each cycle
- Mutual learning
- Dissemination of results
- Progress reporting
- Monitoring of the process.

## **How does the document relate to national concerns in education?**

The document proposes indicators and benchmarks for raising the quality and effectiveness of the national education systems.

They are as follows:

1. **Adult participation in lifelong learning:** By 2020, an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning.
2. **Low achievers in basic skills:** By 2020, the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%.
3. **Tertiary level attainment:** By 2020, the share of the 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%.
4. **Early leavers from education and training:** By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%
5. **Early childhood education:** By 2020, at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.

It has to be taken into consideration that there are at least three different perceptions of EU policy on a Europeanisation of education. (a) in Northern/Western Europe; (b) in post-Communist countries, (c) in Mediterranean countries.

- **Take account of national differences in education systems when indicators and benchmarks are verified.**

## **What are the concerns of churches regarding issues in the document?**

- Churches promote* a human-oriented concept of education, a holistic education that takes into account the whole person and their needs. Churches and European institutions attach the highest value to human dignity.
- Churches encourage* educational justice and criticise unjust structures in the education system.
- Churches consider* that education should foster personal fulfillment and go beyond serving the needs of the economy and the labour market.
- Churches encourage* inter-generational dialogue through their own education activities
- Churches care* for values, moral and ethical issues.

- **Churches are main providers of education and base their concept on a holistic understanding of education that takes into account the spiritual dimension of the human being.**

## What additional documents are helpful in monitoring the ongoing process?

- (1) **A key role of education and training.** On 14 February 2011 the Council of the European Union (Ministers of Education) adopted *Conclusions "on the role of education and training in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy"*. In this document it is emphasized that:

"Education and training have a fundamental role to play in achieving the *Europe 2020* objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth". It is said that this should be done not only "by equipping citizens with the skills and competences which the European economy and European society need in order to remain competitive and innovative, but also by helping to promote social cohesion and inclusion."

(See: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/119282.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/119282.pdf))

- (2) **Implementation of "ET 2020".** On 30 January 2012 a draft 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of "ET 2020" was launched. This report confirmed that "Education and training systems have to be modernised to reinforce their efficiency and quality and to equip people with the skills and competences they need to succeed on the labour market." It states that youth unemployment has risen from 15.5% in 2008 to 20.9% in 2010. 53% of early school leavers were unemployed. These are alarming figures.

(See: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st05/st05600.en12.pdf>)

- (3) **A new programme "Erasmus for All" proposed.** The European Commission proposes a single Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the 2014-2020 period. Some elements of this proposal are contested and a lively discussion is taking place in civil society and in the political committees about the profile of the proposed programme. The respective communication (COM[2011] 787 final) includes the following quote:

"Education and training are now more important than ever for innovation, productivity and growth, especially in the context of the current economic and financial crisis, and yet the potential of Europe's human capital remains underexploited. More need to be done to ensure that education and training systems deliver the knowledge and skills in an increasingly globalised labour market."

(See: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/com\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/com_en.pdf))

## **What should the churches be doing?**

Two types of action are proposed:

- (1)** Internal actions within the constituency of the churches and
- (2)** linking to and participating in the national debates.

### **Internal action:**

- Raising awareness about an increasing Europeanisation of education
- Becoming active in education policy as a provider of education and as a responsible collaborator in public education policy
- Contributing to a process as a partner in civil society
- Sharing one's own experience
- Making churches aware how they contribute to the common good e.g. through schools, confirmation work and adult education.
- Sharing churches' experiences in education, maybe through the Open Method of Coordination adapted to exchanges among the churches.

### **Participation in national debates:**

- linking to the national agents responsible for "ET 2020"
- contributing, if possible, to national reports
- making links between church and state activities in education, and
- reporting to the CSC working group on education about actions and initiatives.

Given the increasing importance of education on national and European level we commend this paper for your serious consideration. We would appreciate your feedback on any action you may take in your context.

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