



**2020/2243(INI)**

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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach  
(2020/2243(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach (2020/2243(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and to the Protocol (No 2) on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality,
- having regard to Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020)0625),
- having regard to the Council resolution of 26 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled ‘Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age’ (COM(2020)0624),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 1 July 2020 entitled ‘European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience’ (COM(2020)0274),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 November 2017 entitled ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture’ (COM(2017)0673),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the 2021 study requested by the Committee on Culture and Education entitled ‘Making the European Education Area a Reality: State of Affairs, Challenges and Prospects’<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the 2018 study requested by the Committee on Culture and Education

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 66, 26.02.2021, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652237/IPOL\\_STU\(2021\)652237\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652237/IPOL_STU(2021)652237_EN.pdf).

entitled ‘European Identity’<sup>4</sup>,

- having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2018 on education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design<sup>5</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 12 June 2018 on modernisation of education in the EU<sup>6</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 57 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0000/2021),
- A. whereas the EU single market and other EU policies have contributed to the natural development of a European educational space, historically underpinned by the traditions of European humanism;
- B. whereas the ultimate goal is building a bottom-up European Education Area with common European policy objectives, requiring existing obstacles to be removed, European tools to be utilised and supporting policies at national and European levels to be developed;
- C. whereas education needs to be conceptualised broadly as ‘lifelong learning’, ranging from pre-primary to tertiary education, including non-formal and informal modes, and being aimed at acquiring transversal skills;
- D. whereas the challenges the EU and its Member States are faced with today, including climate change, various forms of extremism and populism, and the COVID-19 pandemic, require appropriate educational answers and concerted European action;
- E. whereas the realities of educational infrastructure, expertise and resources vary within and across Member States, and whereas those differences have become further pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- F. whereas Parliament has called on Member States to prioritise investments in education and training, valuing education spending as an investment in our common future;
- G. whereas progress has been made in building a European Higher Education Area, arising from the long-term efforts of the Bologna Process;
- H. whereas Member States have not fully achieved the objectives and benchmarks of the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) framework, in particular the aims of enhancing equitable and quality education, reducing the rate of early leavers from education and training, and bringing the share of 15-year-olds who are under-skilled in reading,

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/563c9c61-3b73-11e7-a08e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-193970908>.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 28, 27.1.2020, p. 8.

mathematics and science below 15 %;

### ***The reasoning for a European Education Area***

1. Emphasises the importance of quality education and that the European Education Area (EEA) initiative should provide more and better opportunities for every single European citizen to study, train and work abroad, and cultivate an environment where skills and diplomas are recognised throughout Europe;
2. Stresses the role of the EEA in fostering a sense of European belonging and in providing economic opportunities by addressing existing educational challenges;
3. Considers education a driver for European economic and social prosperity, and for ensuring that the EU is a globally competitive player and leading the green and digital transitions;
4. Calls for the numerous opportunities for ‘European added value’ afforded through education to be seized, especially through mobility and the sharing of best practices, with the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes playing a particularly important role;

### ***Bridging institutional and stakeholder approaches***

5. Takes note of the variety of visions of, and approaches to, an EEA, which express a common wish to provide a new impetus for the ‘European project’;
6. Appreciates the Commission’s efforts to foster an EEA, while noting the need for a more holistic approach, requiring meaningful cooperation and coordination between all actors and stakeholders;
7. Cautions that the Commission’s proposals are still mainly a strategic outline rather than a concrete policy roadmap, and thus suggests setting clear priorities and realistic deadlines for the actions that should be adopted, including clearly defined interim deliverables;
8. Welcomes the Council’s response to the Commission’s proposals, in particular its focus on the importance of vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning opportunities;
9. Emphasises the urgent need to develop a common implementation strategy and roadmap that includes the European institutions, Member States and all relevant stakeholders, and defines their respective responsibilities;

### ***Turning vision into reality: common strategic priorities and EU-level targets***

10. Stresses the potential of using European policy coordination tools to achieve the common objectives of an EEA;
11. Calls for all EU institutions and Member States to agree on the same vision, priorities, targets and benchmarks regarding an EEA, while acknowledging existing diversities in Europe;

12. Highlights inclusiveness as a central dimension of an EEA and a prerequisite for achieving quality education for all, ensuring that no talent is left behind;
13. Supports the use of quantitative indicators and benchmarks to allow the continuous comparison and monitoring of Member States' progress towards common objectives and to incentivise further policy actions, while at the same time reiterating the need for supplementary qualitative indicators and benchmarks;
14. Calls for synergies between the EEA, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area to be exploited and for a further strengthening of the Erasmus+ programme for the benefit of all teachers and learners;
15. Aims to foster media literacy and critical thinking at all stages of learning as a central means to empower responsible European citizens;
16. Calls for a common framework on the development of digital competences and on learning about the EU throughout all appropriate levels and areas of education;
17. Stresses the importance of enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession, especially supported through the improved recognition of educators' value to society and by bolstering pedagogical autonomy;

#### ***Sector-specific measures***

18. Underlines the need for Member States to take action to support the development of linguistic competences in primary and secondary education, to embrace the Council of Europe's goal of 'plurilingualism' and to achieve the benchmark of all pupils having a sufficient knowledge of English at the end of lower secondary education;
19. Stresses the importance of Commission and Member State action in higher education, such as reinforcing the Bologna Process, strengthening the international dimension of the EEA and furthering the European Student Card, including through embracing the synergies offered by existing EU programmes;
20. Calls on the Commission and Member States to facilitate the expansion of automatic mutual recognition of learning outcomes and study periods abroad, including in VET;

#### ***Governance framework***

21. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to establish a concrete European Education Area Strategic Framework 2030 (EEASF 2030) by the end of 2022 with a comprehensive steering, monitoring and evaluation mechanism, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all';
22. Urges the Commission and the Member States to clarify the type of participation required from Member States and other levels of government, including local and regional authorities, and to devise effective multi-level governance arrangements that respect subsidiarity while aiming to generate European added value;

23. Seeks clarity on the level of involvement expected from stakeholders, education sectors that have been underrepresented so far, and relevant civil society actors;
24. Calls on the Commission to establish an EEA Platform as an interactive public gateway to support Member States and stakeholders in exchanging information and promoting cooperation and exchange of good practices;

*Towards a greater European dimension in education*

25. Underlines the need for a European dimension in education by strengthening a distinct European perspective in students' curricula and teachers' training, including with support from Jean Monnet actions and teacher academies; proposes that these teacher academies be called 'Comenius Teacher Academies';
26. Emphasises the need to provide learners with knowledge about European history and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and to foster a critical European memory and historical consciousness;
27. Stresses the need to familiarise learners with the European integration process, the institutions and policies of the EU, the rights emerging from EU citizenship and how to actively participate in the EU's democratic processes;

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28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### General reasoning

The report on the *European Education Area: a shared holistic approach* is the European Parliament's answer to the Commission communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 and to the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030).

The European Education Area (EEA) has been emerging naturally for centuries, based on ancient Greek philosophy, as well as Jewish and Christian spiritual sources and principles. Universities and schools, allowing for collaboration between educators from different parts of Europe, have contributed greatly to its development. Therefore, it is quite logical that relevant European programmes are named after personalities who have been the driving forces behind European education and integration, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Jan Amos Comenius and Jean Monnet. Universities in Europe have gradually become bastions of knowledge and research. From the beginning, their development has relied on academic freedom and international exchange, although this aspect was not always acknowledged. While tertiary education has had this international dimension from the outset, primary and secondary education have traditionally been embedded in specific national and regional contexts. This is reflected in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which calls for cooperation, the recognition of diplomas and periods of study abroad, while aiming at the university level (Art. 165, 2).

The EU Treaties leave decision-making competences in education at Member State level. The role of the European Union is a coordinating and supporting one, a legal basis which this report fully respects. At the same time, it underlines the great potential of an EEA, as is evidenced by the outcomes of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, which allow for the permeability of study programmes for students within the EU and beyond, as well as the gradual recognition of both partial results (credits) and final diplomas. The great potential of an EEA is evident when looking at the results of school partnerships, their joint projects, traineeships and exchanges of pupils and teachers under the Erasmus+ programme. Thousands of schools and hundreds of thousands of pupils and teachers have improved their educational programmes, language skills, and teaching methods. They have gained new practical, educational and professional experience and created new friendships, while gaining familiarity with new cultural and linguistic environments.

This report aims to contribute to the realisation of the full potential of an EEA. In general, the legitimacy of the European project will be strengthened if the EU's efforts towards building an EEA are more effective in the future. In other words, the prevention of further alienation of European citizens from the EU lies precisely in education, in learning about our common roots and values and in considering them in a factually sound way, as well as in the ability to communicate openly and respectfully, and in acting for the benefit of future generations.

Education is also a key tool for building an economically prosperous and socially cohesive society. While this applies to the Member States, it also applies to the sustainability of European integration. This report identifies education as a response to the challenges that the Member States and the Union as a whole are facing. The European Parliament considers investment in education an important aspect of the economic recovery measures and building resilience after the COVID-19 pandemic (Recovery and Resilience Facility), as well as part of measures to combat climate change, rising extremism and populism.

The report perceives the EEA, improvement in its organization, focus on permeability and accessibility within the European programmes, as a new opportunity for the personal development of every single European citizen, but also as a tool to increase the prosperity of each region and strengthen the competitiveness of the EU as a whole.

## **Rationale for specific sections**

### **References – Legal Base**

Union action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, in particular through teaching of languages of the Member States, mobility of students and teachers, recognition of diplomas and periods of study, promotion of cooperation between schools, exchange of experience and people/principles, and supporting distance learning (TFEU, Art.165, 2). The Union aims to support Member States, particularly in their efforts to develop vocational education and training. The Union can achieve its objectives in the field of education by means of ordinary legislative instruments and incentives, but it cannot commit the Member States to specific changes in their laws. The Council may also make recommendations to this effect on a proposal from the Commission. The Union shall conduct its activities in these areas of cooperation through the open method of coordination (based on the use of the methods of coordinating policy in the arena of economic and monetary union).

### **References – Source documents**

From the perspective of a global player, the EU should aim to meet the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>7</sup>. The reference to the source documents contains only a limited number of fundamental communications from the Commission and the Council, and European Parliament resolutions, in particular those directly related to building the EEA. The Council's recommendations (ET 2020) are a key starting point. The objectives and indicators presented by the Council in 2009 are still relevant, as they have not yet been fully achieved. They also serve as a basis for the latest follow-up Council Resolution (2021/C 66/01) and for setting indicators/benchmarks in the Commission Communication (COM(2020)625). Since 2009, more than 40 documents have been adopted at EU level that are directly or indirectly linked with the EEA. An important background document for this report is the study by the EP Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies "Making the European Education Area a Reality: State of Affairs, Challenges and Prospects"<sup>8</sup>.

The European Parliament has repeatedly addressed the topic of an EEA and the importance of education in general, including by calling for financial support at EU level. In the context of the MFF 2021-2027, the European Parliament proposed tripling the Erasmus+ budget<sup>9</sup>. In the end, it managed to secure a virtual doubling of the Erasmus+ budget, which might bring Erasmus+ closer to the ideal of becoming a means of mobility for all learners and teachers. The European Parliament raised the issue of funding education again in the context of the resolution

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

<sup>8</sup> See [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652237/IPOL\\_STU\(2021\)652237\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652237/IPOL_STU(2021)652237_EN.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2018 on the next MFF: Preparing the Parliament's position on the MFF post-2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0075\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0075_EN.html)

on digital education<sup>10</sup>, where it called on the Member States to allocate 10 % of the RRF to education.<sup>11</sup>

## **The reasoning for a European Education Area**

The rapporteur considers the opening of new concrete educational and employment opportunities for every European citizen to be the main reason for building the EEA. The EEA's role is to promote European integration, ensure economic and social prosperity, and boost the EU's international competitiveness and its leadership in the green and digital transformations. The EEA is a unique opportunity to gain European added value through mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

## **Bridging institutional and stakeholder approaches**

When examining the various approaches of the Council, the Commission and stakeholders, in spite of the obvious differences, a clear consensus can be discerned with regard to the need for an EEA and fostering the European project.

Regarding the Commission's Communication on building the EEA by 2025, the rapporteur appreciates the Commission's efforts to consolidate the EEA's intentions, but expects a more holistic approach, based on coordination and cooperation between partners. She calls for clear priorities and realistic deadlines for concrete actions. The rapporteur also comments on the Council resolution, where she particularly welcomes the emphasis on vocational education and training. The European Parliament does not propose its own vision for the EEA, but instead calls for the emergence of a common approach, a common implementation strategy and a roadmap involving all EU institutions, the Member States and all relevant stakeholders.<sup>12</sup>

## **Turning vision into reality: common strategic priorities and EU-level targets**

The rapporteur wants to convey a clear message about the need to move from ideas about the EEA to implementing concrete steps, so that EU citizens can grasp this vision and see it delivered. Therefore, she also calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to agree on a common vision, priorities and benchmarks. The rapporteur considers inclusion, quality education and talent development of all children to be the main dimensions of the EEA. She wants to clearly emphasise that no talent should be left behind.

The rapporteur expects the relevant actors to monitor progress regarding the common objectives by means of targeted indicators and benchmarks, including qualitative targets, with a view to facilitate comparisons. She calls for reinforcing synergies and strengthening the Erasmus+ programme in order to also make it accessible to all those preparing themselves for the teaching profession and to pupils in vocational education and training.

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<sup>10</sup> European Parliament resolution of 25 March 2021 on shaping digital education policy, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0095\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0095_EN.html)

<sup>11</sup> See [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690865/IPOL\\_BRI\(2021\)690865\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690865/IPOL_BRI(2021)690865_EN.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> To compare the positions of the Commission and the Council, please refer to [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690865/IPOL\\_BRI\(2021\)690865\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690865/IPOL_BRI(2021)690865_EN.pdf)

Specific goals of the EEA, which are to be set out in a realistic manner, should focus on strengthening accountability and European citizenship. Therefore, the rapporteur considers it necessary to establish and make use of specific tools for media education, the promotion of critical thinking, and for the creation of a European framework for digital competences and learning about the EU.

Teachers are the ultimate factor for success. That is why the rapporteur, in agreement with the Commission and the Council, sees a priority in increasing teachers' professional competences, motivation and social appreciation.

### **Sector-specific measures**

Promoting foreign language skills is an essential element in all Member States, in particular when it comes to achieving pupils' comparable level in English at the end of lower secondary education (age of 14/15).

The tertiary sector also needs support: by reinforcing the Bologna Process, strengthening international cooperation and integration, furthering the European Student Card, and recognising learning outcomes. The latter also applies to vocational education and training.

### **Governance framework**

The rapporteur strongly advocates the idea of establishing a transparent framework for policy making at EU level in education, while respecting the legal basis and the principle of subsidiarity. She calls on the Commission and the Member States to submit a European Education Area Strategic Framework 2030 (EEASF 2030) by the end of 2022, outlining the governance, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Member States should agree on the level of their participation, as well as on the participation and representation of regions and municipalities, so that the principle of subsidiarity is fully respected and at the same time, European added value can be exploited.

The rapporteur supports the implementation of the Commission's plan to build the EEA Platform, as a part of this new process of designing and promoting European education policy, and expects stakeholders and partners to be fully involved.

### **Towards a greater European dimension in education**

This report aims to strengthen a sense of European belonging and to build European citizenship, not as an ideology, but as a conviction based on objective information, knowledge and experience. Against this backdrop, the inclusion of a European dimension in school curricula, as well as in teacher training, is proposed.

The key role that teachers play has been confirmed by the educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is vital that teachers are well acquainted with Europe's history and present in order to communicate this knowledge to their pupils. They should be able to use opportunities provided by the Jean Monnet actions within Erasmus+ to acquire and complete their teaching competencies in this area.

The report supports the initiative of the Commission to set up the Teacher Academies and suggests that an adequate name for them would be the “Comenius Teacher Academies”. As a great European philosopher, educator and theologian, Comenius exerted great influence on pedagogical theory and practical educational work for centuries.