

# The future of European education: A political strategy & four action areas

Alfonso Diestro Fernández

Received: 15 October 2014 / Accepted: 17 November 2014 / Published online: 16 December 2014  
© The Author(s) 2014. This article is published with open access at Springerlink.com

**Abstract** The European integration project is confronting one of the greatest challenges in its recent history. The profound current financial crisis is jeopardising both trust in the process of integration and the support of European Union citizens. This paper aims to show the need to find transversal solutions to the immediate and future challenges that the European integration project faces. These solutions could emerge from the retrieval of the idea of including a European Dimension in Education, as a joint political strategy of the European Union and the Council of Europe, given that two separate, but convergent, trends have been identified. Special importance will be placed on the four action points that the European dimension could adopt (curricular and teaching materials; creation of school networks and extracurricular activities; initial and on going teacher training; and styles of centre management, leadership and administration). A firm commitment to embed a great deal of Europeanism into the education of the younger European generations (from the earliest age possible) would favour both a greater, and better, understanding of the process, and the active, participative and critical development of European citizens. It is here where the future challenge for European Education lies.

**Keywords** European dimension in education · Education for citizenship · European Union · Council of Europe · Educational policies · Supranational strategy · European challenge

This article is part of the Topical Collection on The Future of Europe, guest-edited by Markus Pausch.

A. Diestro Fernández (✉)  
Departamento de Teoría de la Educación y Pedagogía Social,  
Facultad de Educación, Universidad Nacional de Educación a  
Distancia (UNED), Despacho 281. Calle Juan del Rosal, nº 14, CP.  
28040 Madrid, Spain, EU  
e-mail: adiestro@edu.uned.es

## Introduction

Nobody can now ignore that Europe is currently facing a huge predicament; this obliges Europe to reinvent itself once again if the region wishes to realise the original aspirations that motivated the current project of building and integrating Europe, *establishing a closer union between its peoples and its regions*. In the present context, characterised by the economical crisis, the political programmes of only one way and the political disaffection of the citizens with the European project, it is a matter of urgency to find new proposals, also for educational politics, across a new process of deliberation between institutions and Members States. That is, the countries that make up the *European Club*, both the *Council of Europe* (COE, 47) and the *European Union* (UE, 28), do not seem to understand this as an urgent challenge, if they wish to continue cooperating and consolidating the project, with the purpose of achieving the collective goals and objectives that would certainly not be achieved individually. The fact that this supranational alliance has brought about more than half a century of peace and prosperity on a great scale must not be overlooked.

We stand in front of a Europe of two faces, which presents an endemic and historical confrontation between the merchants and the citizens; between the states and the peoples and the regions; between the economy and the shared culture, roots and heritage; between bureaucracy and social reality. There are two aspects of the same Europe represented by the EU and the COE; two twinned organisations of European countries, (supranational in the case of the EU, and intergovernmental in the case of the COE) that share an embryonic context, an *alma mater*, an iconography and a common aim: the close union between its peoples and its regions, based and consolidated on a joint economy and a congruent distribution of wealth, according to the EU; and on a common and shared culture, education, heritage, values and legacy, according to the COE.

Both the EU and the COE, as entities, make up a dual Europe that is as dynamic and original as it is necessary. These two aspects represent together a geopolitical and virtual Europe, in the widest sense of the word, that expands itself, *but the governing idea is that it rests on a number of values that become relevant in a common contractualised project* [17]. This is the global Europe that must look at itself today and assess if it is able to move forward with the political project, without taking into consideration Europe's main asset: its citizens. This is the immediate challenge of 21st century Europe and of Europeans themselves: to integrate the different versions of Europe into one political project that defends the inclusion of a *European Dimension in Education* (EDE) as an immediate answer to the present and future European challenges.

Consequently, it is a matter of urgency to find solutions which inspire the European social and political mass and which offer answers to the great challenges that the European political organisations confront. Our proposal focuses on the support of the inclusion of the EDE in a joint and transversal manner, with the aim of favouring *education for democratic citizenship* (EDC), Europeanism, a European identity and the premise of *unity in diversity*, via the paradigm of lifelong learning. This idea acquires its heritage (*acquis communautaire*) and all its sense in the framework of the COE and the EU; it is a key concept that deserves to be revitalised and recuperated for political and social European action. Furthermore, four essential action points can be identified, in which the EDE could act in a decisive way, thus favouring the understanding and consolidation of the idea of Europe among its citizens considering that the forthcoming challenge of *re-building Europe is a democratic project that should be immediately embedded in educational and training establishments*.

### **The necessity of recovering a shared European political and pedagogical heritage (the *acquis communautaire* in education)**

Both the intrahistory of education and citizenship via education reveal that, in times of economic prosperity, the European Council has undoubtedly given support to these issues. However, when there were periods of global economical crisis, these areas were overlooked and the interest in economic aspects became more important than the interest in people. The common motto (*united in diversity*) assumed by all the European institutions does not hold when partners face periods of vast economic adversity. Is Europe united in the face of adversity? Each time that Europe has been stricken by a crisis, the collateral dimensions of the project have felt the effects, especially those facets related to the construction of a social and civic Europe. The aim is to place people alongside

the Euro and the Internal Market, to give citizens equal prominence, and to enforce the fundamental agreements signed by both organisations in matters of education and citizenship. The EU and the COE count on a political heritage (*acquis communautaire*) in education worthy of being referred to, and used, as a political strategy to encourage a change of direction, and able to confront the immediate challenges. Solely, the willingness of the Member States and a good awareness strategy of the process sought are required.

### **The groundbreaking activity of the council of Europe in educational policy**

In the historical and political analysis that Diestro [13] carried out throughout the regulatory documents related to EU and COE education policies, it can be observed how the EU education policy emerges under the wing of the cooperation initially started in the COE during the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, two elements stand out: the groundbreaking activity developed by the *Standing Conference of Ministers of Education* (SCME) since 1959, and the regulatory framework that led to the European Cultural Convention in 1954 (a *soft* regulatory connection, based on the willingness of the signatories to cooperate).

The existence of certain channels of interrelation between both organisations is mentioned, and it is called the *theory of communicating vessels*. Via the SCME acting as *pan-European forum* of debate on education, it acted as the breeding ground of EU education policy, given that the ministers of education in the Community also belonged to SCME. This interrelation was very positive during the 1960s, as the SCME became a European laboratory of education policies where the possibilities of an intergovernmental cooperation (without a strong regulatory link, but committed via the proposal of alternatives and solutions) were discussed.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, after the launch of a Community education policy, a duality of functions and resources appeared, along with a notable dispersion of efforts, which persisted until 1989. At the end of the 1980s, the pan-European organisation focused on the transformation of its political structures and organs as a response to the new situation brought about by the fall of the *Berlin Wall* (1989). The *European Cultural Convention* had set an exceptional framework for collaboration, as there was no obligation to act with one voice; in contrast, there was the opportunity to debate, collaborate and experiment in multiple ways, without the strain of a binding regulatory framework that required commitment. This *soft* collaboration favoured consensus and flexible cooperation patterns, as well as the publication of numerous regulatory documents, in the form of resolutions or recommendations, addressed to participants. The significance education had acquired at the COE was reflected in 1989, by

stating that *education is the second priority for the organisation, after the defence of human rights* [2:6].

Diestro and G<sup>a</sup> Blanco [14] underlined that reports and resolutions about critical subjects that aggravated European educational systems (expansion and democratisation of education, language learning and its methodologies, construction of schools, education for all, schooling for the children of immigrants, etc.) were written in the SCME until 1971. However, the beginning of a potential cooperation, in relation to education in the context of the European Community, led to an increase of attention with regard to the styles and methods of intergovernmental political cooperation in education, rather than with regard to the actual content in education. The conviction to expand European cooperation in relation to education was also expressed via the SCME, to offer better opportunities to the young, in a world where competitiveness was increasingly more intense and the international cooperation was turning out to be progressively more necessary.

The *expansion of education in Europe*—a key aspect at that moment and an area around which the initial interest of the SCME revolved—was determined by the demographic growth of the post-war period, as well as by the rapprochement of children and young people who had remained cut off from education over this period. There was an enormous education demand in all European countries, which led to the enlargement of compulsory education up to secondary level, as well as to a greater demand for technical and professional qualifications as instruments to guarantee access to the common market and to mobility. Ministers had detected common problems in the different member states and, given the situation, it was deemed that a revision and detailed analysis of the problems of education in Europe was necessary. Common actions had to be established to start up a collective process towards the improvement of European education systems, with a view to a new social horizon:

*They agreed to keep each other mutually informed both about the programmes undertaken to apply the initial reforms, and about the results, hence offering mutual support in the creation of their respective national plans, with the aspiration to progressively reach a set of education systems that protected the particularities of national cultures, making the willingness for European cooperation a reality. (...) Additionally, they understood that certain measures could be applied jointly from that moment to gear certain school programmes, such as history, geography, literature and civil education, towards a European and international understanding.* [12:51].

They were aware that the convulsions suffered by the education systems towards the end of the 1960s had affected European countries as a whole. According to Titz [23:46], *the*

*events in 1968 represented the expression of very deep disparities, in spite of the different shapes that they took in each country, between the education systems and a social demand which was in the process of transforming itself and whose contents were not established in a precise manner, given the unpredictability that characterised that period.* Therefore, in 1969 the SCME ministers decided that it was necessary to re-examine working methods and to coordinate a more effective way of proceeding, especially regarding the inspection of common tendencies and the evolving aspects of education in Europe, with a view to successfully establishing a more harmonious and converging trend.

The development of education policy in the European Union

It is not our aim to make a synopsis of education policy in Europe, as there are already excellent articles available that describe its historical evolution, political development, distinctive elements (principles, objectives and targets), specific factors and critical analysis; among which one may cite, for example, the work completed by Valle [24]. Most authors admit that, in the first years of political cooperation of the Community, education was neither one of the areas of interest, nor an area to be considered for cooperation in the short term. However, the first meetings of Ministers of Education of the Community at the beginning of the 1970s, and the presentation of the Janne Report [19] *for a Community policy in education*, would lead to substantial changes, and to the need of establishing precise and decisive agreements.

*Since 1971, Member States have become aware of the interest that Community cooperation with regard to education produces. In 1973, the Janne Report underlined the importance of relations between education, economy and the development of post-school teaching systems (permanent or lifelong education). The relationship between educational aspects (and cultural aspects) and economic aspects (and social aspects) has finally become undeniable.* [18:476].

Those years were crucial in the reflection and definition of cooperation in education, which would be established as a theory in the second meeting of Ministers of Education (1974). The unquestionable necessity to cooperate in this area was admitted at the event, although it was explained that it should be implemented in progressive stages. Nevertheless, there was no doubt in recognising that *education should not be an instrument at the service of the economic and productive market, and that such a cooperation should not affect the competences allocated to the EU institutions in the field of education.* Only two years later, the initiative was launched in the *Action Programme in the field of education* (1976). Its activation could be understood as a clear sign of enthusiasm to

develop a *policy* in education (beyond goodwill and purpose) and a supportive stance in favour of a *Europe of education and citizenship*. The aforementioned Programme experienced serious problems at its outset, which commenced in particular sectors in the middle of the eighties. The deep economic crisis at the end of the 1970s caused by the constant increase in petrol prices, and high inflation and unemployment rates, did not favour the increment in economic budget lines that should have been allocated to the new policy in education. Consequently, the fulfilment of the planned actions would be delayed by more than five years, due to the lack of economic resources in the Community [13:220–221]. Finally, education and citizenship would not form part of EU law until the *Treaty on European Union* (TEU; 1992), acknowledging policy in education as one of the areas of EU cooperation and establishing a *medium-hard* regulatory and political connection among its Member States.

In Maastricht, European citizenship was also recognised as a complement to, rather than a replacement of, national citizenship (a wide range of citizens' rights that expanded the coverage from a national to a supranational framework). Art. 126 of the TEU even included the intention to grant a European dimension to the experience of students and teachers of the Member States. Despite that, the EU, due to its idiosyncrasy and its policy in education based on principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and absolute respect of national competences, has never adopted a decisive stand to favour education. Citizenship *is* recognised, but the interest to develop its education systems is left in the hands of the Member States without specifying the establishment of guaranteed minimums in all States. Obviously, it is not about obliging Member States to renounce their national competencies, but if they have agreed to expand citizenship to a supranational framework, it would be logical that the Member States themselves guaranteed to one another that it would be done in such a way.

As from the TEU, a change in the paradigm towards a new era in education for citizenship in Europe may be detected (1992–2010), and it is related to the emphasis that led to the inclusion of the EDC (the changes and challenges) [20] and the EDE in supranational political heritage (*acquis communautaire*).

*Mirroring these contemporaneous socio-political developments, European Citizenship Education policies evolved rapidly and markedly during this period. One of the most notable developments is the increasing number and scope of European initiatives for citizenship education... and both the EU and the COE launched a plethora of projects on the subject [21:83].*

We agree with the view presented by Diestro and Valle [15], in the sense that the EU and the COE intergovernmental education policies cannot be fully understood without each

other, as their relation channels and their analogies are notable and evident. Additionally, their discrepancies (tendencies) are complementary, shaping an enriching and remarkable theoretical *corpus*, as a paradigmatic model of supranational education policies, based on the EDE and its perpetual relationship with citizenship, intercultural awareness and European identity.

*The reasons for this phenomenon are manifold, but I believe that the main cause lies in verifying that, whatever becomes of the European institutions in the future, it is clearly understood that, henceforth, the life of European students and young people will develop in an European context (...). Therefore, education that solely focuses on a particular national State will not provide citizens with the required intellectual tools, knowledge and attitudes that will permit them to take advantage, as active and responsible citizens, of the set of opportunities that this new European context offers them for their future. In this manner, the concerns to broaden the foundations of education and grant it a European dimension were derived [6:1].*

### The European dimension in education. definition, nature and trends<sup>1</sup>

Rescuing and integrating the EDE in the current European context is not an easy task due to several reasons: on the one hand, it is a concept brimming with numerous political and pedagogical connotations, *an enigma for educational policy*, as suggested by Ryba, lies at a point of tension between precisely the two notions of unity and diversity, expressed in the motto [22: 25–26]; on the other hand, it is a concept dispersed between the two organisations, and it only acquires full sense via an integrating approach. If the EDE is analysed according to how it is understood and developed by each organisation through its published documents, two completely

<sup>1</sup> This epigraph refers to the analyses realised by the author in his Doctoral Thesis, cited in the bibliography [13: 445–530] (Chapter 7. *The European Dimension in Education: Comparative and supranational perspectives*). This process is based on the analysis and the interpretation of different documents dedicated to this specific question (EDE) in the EU and the COE. We can only emphasise the real ones, which try to be a strategy or tool of action: EU, *European Commission Resolution about EDE* (1988); and COE, *Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education Resolution n° 1, about EDE: practical of the teaching and contents of the programs* (1991). The rest are documents referring to intentional aspects—also very important—of the process of deliberation between the institutions of each organisation (the encouragement of European subjects at History and Geography schools, the promotion of a European community spirit, the fostering of exchanges among teachers and students, the learning of languages, etc.).



distinct, and yet remarkably convergent, tendencies can be observed [13]. The following bar chart reveals the documents that the COE and EU have devoted to the EDE in different periods over more than 50 years. These periods define the tendencies of each organisation as regards strategies, objectives, contents and scope.

Source: own writing based on Diestro [13: 583–609] (Fig. 1).

But, *what does the EU understand when it refers to the EDE in the framework of its cooperation policy on education?* It is an adjustment and coherence element in the national education processes and systems in the face of the new economic, social and cultural context, promoted by the *Single Market* and by the education competencies assumed by the Community at the TEU. This idea lies on the development of European citizenship, on offering opportunities to improve quality in education, and on training young people in their transition and integration towards social and working lives, via a framework of key competencies, as an added value to the general goals of education. Its motivation is supplementary and its orientation is geared towards the *peripheral elements* (instrumental aspects) of education systems, especially using mobility, exchanges, European language learning and EDC. To some extent, the EU promotes the EDE towards education for Europe in an almost instrumental manner, pushing the attitudinal facets vis-à-vis Europe into the background of its political action.

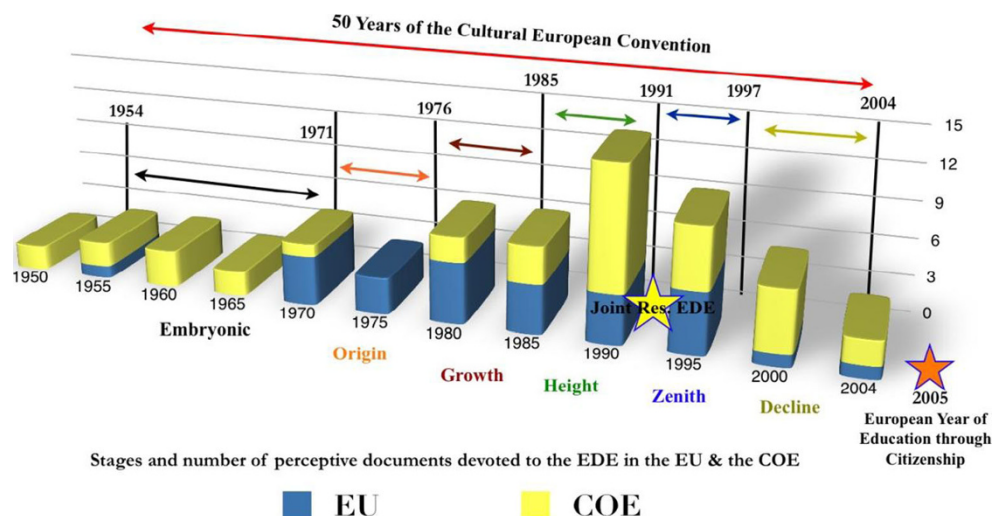
And, *what does the COE understand when it refers to the EDE in the framework of its intergovernmental policy in education?* The best reflection of the global interpretation of the EDE in the COE can be expressed via the thoughts articulated by the Group of Experts for the EDE, who understand that it is *a system of attitudes and intellectual approximations that rest on pluralism, tolerance, receptivity towards others and, finally, on the development of individual capacities, such as the capacity for synthesis, critical analysis and*

*personal judgement* [7:210]. Also, it represents a new philosophy in education that has an impact on all the areas of educational programmes, on curricular and extracurricular activities, as well as educational work in general. *What is defined via the EDE idea is the actual essence of education systems. Being European is not simply a state as an outcome of circumstances; it is the basis of the education that we wish to put in place for future generations* [8:2–3]. In the COE, as was already conveyed in the *conference paper* of the Vienna SCME in 1991, the EDE should encourage education for and about Europe [3]:4–6]. In other words, it should place emphasis on the core elements of education systems that generate attitudinal competences.

The main element of discord between the EU and the COE lies in the instrumental nature that the EU grants to the global renovation of education (*as a recommendable option*), and the precursory nature as a driving force, which the COE attaches to it (*as a must*). The joint perception of the process and the creation of a normative-political *acquis communautaire* devoted to the EDE, based on the documents acknowledged by both organisations, reveal differing aspects that derive from the policies of the COE and the EU. However, as shown in Fig. 1, no new specific documents devoted to the EDE have been published since 2005. It is therefore urgent to recover the EDE as an immediate challenge, to revitalise it and include it at the heart of European education proposals in a decisive manner, if the challenge of citizenship is to be addressed.

The analysis of the documents devoted to the EDE in the COE and the EU allows to define the general aim of its pedagogic action like this: *It should make young generations become aware of the European identity to be able to assume responsibilities as citizens of Europe and get to know its culture, heritage and common values* [13]. The EDE has an essentially political and pedagogical nature. Its political roots are obvious, as it originates, develops and undergoes a theoretical and practical transformation as part of two

**Fig. 1** The historical-political route of the European dimension in education



fundamentally political organisations. Its acceptance as a key concept in Europe, and its direct implications in education policies, grant it a remarkable value that allows it to incorporate itself into all sorts of aspects related to supranational cooperation in education, whilst tinting it with a good deal of Europeanism. The potential of the political and pedagogical symbiosis of the EDE lies in its capacity to bring together these two dimensions. It even promotes the pooling (at European level) of ideas, experiences and attempts regarding good pedagogical practices with which the challenges, needs, obstacles and common problems of European education systems (such as the typical elements of educational trends that take place in Europe in the 21st century) may be confronted. In contrast, as long as the EDE finds an insurmountable obstacle in the principles of *subsidiarity*, and that Member States deem that the actual inclusion of this idea could signify a lack of *respect towards its national competencies*, it will not be possible to change the current outlook or the political vision in Europe.

*In the emerging European education space, education is governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and member states retain the control over the structure and the content of their school curricula. European education policies are therefore not binding and member states could easily ignore European initiatives in this area [21:95].*

However, every attempt to define or set out this idea should be obliged to base itself on the educational heritage (*acquis communautaire*) acquired by both organisations over more than half a century of cooperation. The EDE is not solely just another element of European education policy; it is the quintessence that should infuse and pass through all its aspects. It is not possible to conceive any type of European education policy (complementary or convergent) without the idea of the EDE as a key core question. Therefore, to satisfy the objective of integrating it into policies and into national education systems a reforming process (firstly circumstantial, then structural) should be initiated.

The EDE affects all areas, structures, stages, subjects, processes, scenarios and agents involved in education, via the paradigm of lifelong learning. Regarding the most specific aspects, the integration of the EDE should act as an agent for change in the pedagogical paradigm. It must meet a triple orientation as a *sine qua non* condition to favour education *for, for the sake of and about* (or *relative to*) Europe, in the same proportion and without overlooking any of them. Education *for* Europe in the sense of enabling its citizens to live and work in the ample European context and providing them with the necessary tools; *for the sake of* Europe via a Europeanist pedagogy that promotes awareness of the idea of Europe in education and the assimilation of that process; and *about* Europe, through content, proceedings, attitudes and aspects in relation to the teaching-learning process. These three specific

orientations that make up the EDE should encourage the development of an *Europeanist* competence, based on three other elements:

In the same way, all the pedagogical programmes which try to introduce and favour the EDE should pay special attention to three key elements to strengthen the image and the understanding of the idea of Europe in the new generations: *European identity* (Euro-global and opened to the world). The Europe of peoples and regions; of the countries; of the citizens; 2. *Culture interaction* (interculturalism) and joint in diversity, supported by social cohesion and equality among peoples and regions, unity in diversity; 3. *European citizenship* (political and legal status), active democracy, Europeanism, sustainable development [15].

All of the above would allow the consolidation of a unique and shared political project of integration that would favour long-lasting peace and prosperity for all of Europe's people. The EDE would symbolise the political and pedagogical legacy that we must put in place for future generations, as a result of all the years of European cooperation in education.

#### **Four main action areas of the European dimension in education as a roadmap**

Via the project undertaken by the COE, *A secondary education for Europe* (1992–1996), the team of experts in charge, with Ryba as their leader, drew up a *Final Report*, containing the progress and results of their work. They explained then that, in the light of the results obtained from their programme of work and the activities carried out, it was certain the situation of the European dimension had improved in some countries, but only relatively. In fact, it was solely a minor improvement, if the existing limiting conditions were taken into consideration, together with the fact that progress had not taken place evenly in all of the countries, in spite of the efforts made and the appearance of several very useful publications. *The EDE was still overlooked in school programmes, and most teachers were still very far from having understood the relevance of the EDE contribution and the suitable types of materials to achieve this aim.*

*To build Europe is above all a democratic project, and it is convenient that it puts down roots in teaching centres. It represents a resource of an open methodology that rests on experience, which must promote critical thinking, analysis and synthesis, and that goes further than the curricular contents to look for the roots of life in the teaching centres. This new practice is based on the participation of all the educational community (...)*

*Teaching centres become a coherent group that records its action in a local community open to the world.* [9:6].

Therefore, we understand that, given the challenge of integrating the EDE as a future road map, four primary areas of action must be specially highlighted, which are very important in their development: a) syllabus and teaching materials; b) creation of school networks and encouragement of extracurricular activities; c) initial and ongoing teacher training; and d) management, leadership and administration styles at teaching centres. Yet, identifying and promoting these areas of action is as important as developing them in a coherent and integrating manner, according to *the unity in diversity* of the Member States.

#### Inclusion of the European dimension in the curriculum, and teaching materials

Since the outset of the EDE, the aspect of including the idea of Europe as educational content in the curricula has not been studied in detail [4]. On the contrary, in many cases it has turned out to be quite a controversial question due to the Member States' evident reluctance to cooperate in these core matters. Within the framework of the EU, the Member States have never been overenthusiastic about the idea, and hence they have focused their efforts on instrumental areas of the EDE. In fact, from the start of European collaboration, there has been a general consensus about the ineffectiveness of introducing the idea of Europe as a new subject area in school programmes, already too overloaded; there is even the potential danger that it is reduced to a marginal school subject. In contrast, the COE has indeed devised innovative teaching approaches, such as the *programme of educational materials to teach about the European dimension* (1993).

The COE programme focused on the creation of several dossiers and monographs, as well as on their organisation and evaluation. These educational materials aimed to offer teachers educational alternatives to integrate the European dimension into their everyday practices, whilst benefiting from the combination of subjects and school programmes. A wide range of topics was covered, such as *Human Rights in Europe; Conflicts in Europe; Teaching citizenship*, etc. The main value of these resources lay in their cross-curricular and interdisciplinary qualities, as well as in the fact that they could be used anywhere within the European area. These materials created by the COE (*dossiers* and *monographs*) are a good starting point, within the necessary process of reflection regarding how the idea of Europe should be integrated today into the curriculum, and into school programmes.

Consequently, drawing on these earlier experiences, a double integrated approach (interdisciplinary and cross-curricular) could currently be adopted; that is to say, an approach affecting every subject in school and extracurricular

programmes of basic and compulsory education, integrating itself in the syllabus as one more reality, complementing the local, national and regional realities. In that sense, language learning and school exchanges become a key EDE tool. It is, particularly, *a matter of interdisciplinary perspectives within teaching centres, and it requires a close inspection of the teaching act, according to learning, methods, teacher training and teaching materials* [10:21–22]. Therefore, the aspect of content leads to a change in the methodological paradigm:

*A more appropriate method to integrate the European dimension in the content of programmes would consist of revisiting the presentation of those contents, for instance, introducing the idea that a particular aspect or topic can be tackled from different viewpoints and outlooks, according to the traditions of a country, and also according to different schools of thought. (...) A possible starting point could be a broader understanding of the European dimension, perceived less as academic content and more as a system of attitudes and intellectual approximations based on pluralism, tolerance, openness to other individuals, and ultimately, on the development of personal capacities to be able to synthesise and think critically in order to make a personal judgement* [6:4].

In hereafter, the nature of the European dimension implies that its integration into the curriculum and school programmes could be done following a change in the methodological and pedagogical paradigms. Then, the idea that the EDE will be understood as a driving force in education as a whole, as well as a key factor in any reform, gains ground. Recently, Cort [11] has published an interesting essay about the policy and practice in the Europeanization of Curricula in Europe.

#### The European dimension in extracurricular activities and the links between schools

The changing power of the EDE could also permeate through extracurricular activities and incorporate itself into the school community as a whole, as it could assume its full relevance as a powerful cross-curricular element, able to closely intertwine academic and extracurricular activities, whilst outlining pedagogical projects and multidisciplinary approaches that would go beyond life at school. As a consequence, the development of a culture of participation in EU schools is increasingly more imperative. The common activities carried out over more than 50 years of cooperation in education, such as exchanges of students and teachers (the Socrates programme), educational events (school competitions; *Europe Days in schools; Europe Day*), networks of multilateral collaboration between teaching centres, common educational projects, grants for teacher

training in European affairs, etc., clearly reinforce the supranational dimension in schools.

The so-called *Pedagogy behind school exchanges* [5] must figure prominently and would imply aspects such as teacher training aimed at school links and exchanges, exchanges as elements in both the curriculum and educational programmes, and the potential that ICT offers in their development. However, in spite of the fact that many European educational establishments have joined different patterns of school exchanges or links via European programmes, it has not yet become a conventional practice in Europe. In some way, it has not been possible, at a national dimension, for schools to be supported, encouraged and motivated to perform multilateral activities. *Above all*, school exchanges denote a key element for mutual understanding in a multicultural society.

These experiences of inter-school collaboration rely on teachers as the main actors in their implementation and development. They are also useful to encourage innovative pilot experiences, to consolidate the flow of information among teachers, as well as to reuse and reinforce teaching methodologies that favour good practices with a European dimension. Similarly, students and their families are the main beneficiaries, as they are given the opportunity to participate in exchanges, to get drawn in and take part in life at school. These activities are based on direct experiences that imply specific situations, close to real life, that place the emphasis on problem-solving, on obtaining concrete results via teamwork and assumed common responsibilities. For example, it is necessary to highlight the *e-twinning* initiative ([www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)), *the community for schools in Europe* offers a big network to share proposals and find European partners in this field.

The European dimension and (initial and continuous) teacher training

It is indispensable to include initial and continuous teacher training, with a view to teaching staff being familiarised with the importance, processes and problems of the European dimension from the early stages of their training. The inclusion of the EDE as a qualitative factor in both the initial and continuous teacher training is desired, also making the most of the training mobility opportunities generated by the creation of the *European Higher Education Area*. As a result, there are three factors around which action should be taken, particularly at the early stages of training programmes:

- a) A greater receptiveness on the part of new teaching staff regarding the European dimension (for example, supporting the Erasmus programme in education and training degrees);
- b) The reinforcement of the European framework of key *competencies* concern all teachers as future professionals;

- c) A belief in *more specific competencies* related to the introduction of the European dimension in education (*Europeanization of subjects to restructure their methods and content*) or, in the activity of administrative or managerial functions in educational establishments.

Furthermore, an inner connection should be established between initial and lifelong training. The proposals put forward at the initial training stages should have continuity as well as a sequential logic in continuous teacher training. The European dimension could even be placed in lifelong education, as one of the specific training needs at schools. Training in the EDE should prepare participants for the management of activities geared towards refresher courses for professionals at their own schools. Both the successful planning and implementation of these activities, and the exploitation of the opportunities offered by European programmes, are key in the processes of continuous education. A wide range of activities must be offered in order to cater for the existing diversity among teaching staff. That is to say, to address this diversity, the continuous training initiatives must lead to very distinct modalities that allow teaching staff to find a formula that fits their particular context and needs. The interest in the European dimension will contribute to a better (and more flexible) training throughout their entire professional teaching career. It is crucial that teachers acquire the ability to adapt to the constant changes that the European context brings. Otherwise, any type of training may become obsolete within a short time.

Applying the European dimension to school management, leadership and administration styles

EDE integration should also lead to changes in school organisation and structure, while requiring more flexible designs and permanently innovative processes. Therefore, it will be necessary to equip schools with a greater autonomy to manage themselves, and to set up decentralisation and to transfer processes towards municipalities and local entities. This openness situation will imply the need to create and redefine new professional profiles for teaching agents and school managers. Teachers will no longer act single-handedly in a classroom, and their mission will not only consist of supplying knowledge. The role of managers—now also as managers and leaders in the education community—, of administrative staff and other agents involved in the inclusion of the EDE in the management of the school community, all acquire a greater significance.

The educational leadership of school managers towards the European dimension cannot be sufficiently emphasised, they underline that the EU includes leadership as one of the crucial aspects in the quality of education systems and, particularly, in



school management. Educational leadership is related to education and the effects it has on students' level of achievement and their direct learning experiences [1]. The European Commission has placed special attention on leadership in education in the European context, as a strategy to raise quality in education, providing adequate initial teacher training and continuous development of teaching staff, and to make teaching an inviting choice as a professional career [16:11]. Its main strength lies in the fact that, to orientate the European dimension towards education implies the development of a profound, structural Europeanist project, with schools and educational establishments at its heart, and the leadership of education professionals who are competent in the European dimension. The choice to include the EDE in school life must go hand in hand with a careful and thought-out planning stage, based on the culture of participation and on the openness of educational establishments to the community to which they belong. In this perspective, the educational establishment becomes the epicentre of diversity and Europeanism, in line with the closest local context (doing a better convergence between the peoples and regions in Europe).

## Conclusions

The EDE aims to imbue national education systems with a Europeanist substance, which complements national traditions, and rests on the common principles and values of our historical heritage and the cultural legacy (*acquis communautaire*) shared by all Europeans. Its strength lies in the progressive installation of a new Europeanist philosophy of education (via a transformational undercurrent), which favours openness with regard to education systems, policies and teaching practices in Europe. This process, established in a coherent and functional manner, will encourage the creation and consolidation of a consistent, accessible, flexible and diverse European Education Area; a place where the younger generations from any country can acquire key competences to live, feel, understand, work and socialise in Europe, as well as perform their duties and responsibilities as European citizens. The value brought into the intergovernmental education cooperation by the EDE becomes especially meaningful for the raising of quality in education, if action is taken globally and in a coordinated way in all the four previously mentioned areas of action.

Rediscovering the EDE and insisting on these areas is crucial to the renovation and reestablishment of educational policy and pedagogy in Europe, as an answer to future challenges. Its sphere of influence affects education as a whole, thus all elements of education and training systems must be incorporated, from *core elements* (attitudinal) to *peripheral elements* (instrumental). This idea could signify the

cornerstone of the supranational European education policy of the 21st century. It is the driving force that runs through all the elements, specific areas and programmes of this policy. Its versatility imbues it with attitudes which act as the guiding principle and engine of all the activities in education matters. It could become the political paradigm par excellence of supranational education towards change and pedagogical renovation in Europe, together with diversity. Its relevance is backed up by the European socio-political context, which effectively heads towards a globalised future, inter-reliant with the Europe of people and regions, united by their diversity. Therefore, its prominence in national education policy must be revitalised and fed from the European institutions as a whole, because otherwise it will not be possible to build a common future, with firm foundations, beyond economy and market needs. Only in this way is it possible to understand a path towards common management of a Europeanist education system, based on the cross-curricular nature of the EDE, via a multilateral and decentralised collaboration, with shared responsibilities at different levels (from the European institutions to minor local entities).

The main obstacles that the present proposal may encounter are the ways to persuade the Member States, on one hand, to overcome the problem of tension between the nation as old ethnocentric container and Europe as new ethnocentric container. In the background of this question is the search for a better equilibrium between the *unity* (so far of the economic dimension) in *diversity* (so close in the cultural and pedagogical dimension); and on the other hand, to allocate financial resources which sustain a coherent achievement of political action, and fundamentally, that the Member States themselves value this proposal as a positive initiative (this latter aspect seems unlikely, given the historical events which have occurred). The Member States have been the main impediment and conditioning element in their fate regarding education policy. So far, they have never shown sufficient forward-looking vision to go beyond national interests in favour of a greater convergence, such as occurs with common policies. It is time to ask the Member States to make a firm commitment to education and citizenship in the immediate future, via the inclusion of the EDE in the national education systems.

The EDE like a political strategy could be the political answer of the Members States to the European educational challenges in the near future (*an old innovation for a new time, characterised by a real unity in diversity*). And its four main action areas could be developed with *good practice* and pedagogical innovations like a political and pedagogical road map. Finally, is important to highlight that this work is a political proposal based on the idea of the EDE, like the essence of the *acquis communautaire* obtained in the recent European history and its educational and political issues. All the collateral aspects of its development in other European dimensions (political, cultural, social, etc.) need to be

reviewed and re-thought by the main agents involved. These proposals include a beginning of a deliberation process and intend to give a first step to launch the redefinition process to build a new Europe in the 21st century through education and citizenship.

**Open Access** This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits any use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

## References

- Bernal A, Jover G, Ruiz M, & Vera J. (2013) Liderazgo personal y construcción de la identidad profesional del docente. En Argos, J. Y Ezquerro, P. (coord.) XXXII Seminario Interuniversitario de Teoría de la Educación: Liderazgo y Educación. Universidad de Cantabria, Cantabria, pp. 19-42
- Conseil de l'Europe (1990) Rapport de synthèse adresse au Comité d'Éducation du Symposium l'enseignement secondaire en Europe à Bruxelles, CDCC-ED (91) 12
- Conseil de l'Europe (1991a) Conférence Permanente des Ministres Européens de l'éducation. 17<sup>ième</sup> session Vienne. La dimension européenne de l'éducation: pratique de l'enseignement et contenu des programmes. Document de séance. Strasbourg. MED-17-3.
- Conseil de l'Europe (1991b) Conférence Permanente des Ministres Européens de l'éducation. 17<sup>ième</sup> session Vienne. La dimension européenne de l'éducation: pratique de l'enseignement et contenu des programmes. Rapport d'activités présenté à la Session. MED 17-4.
- Conseil de l'Europe (1992) La pédagogie des échanges scolaires, rapport. 56<sup>o</sup> Séminaire du COE pour enseignants, Donaueschingen, 22-27 juin 1992. DECS/SE/BS/Donau (92) 2.
- Conseil de l'Europe (1994a) Quelques réflexions sur les différents aspects du concept de la dimension européenne de l'éducation, document élaboré par Titz. DECS/SE/Sec (94) 9
- Conseil de l'Europe (1994b) Un enseignement secondaire pour l'Europe. Conférence finale. Quel enseignement secondaire pour une Europe en mutation? Tendances, enjeux et perspectives. Conférence finale. L'enseignement secondaire: une notion commune, présenté par Kallen, D. DECS/SE/Sec (95) 55, rév
- Conseil de l'Europe (1996a) Un enseignement secondaire pour l'Europe. Rapport final sur la Dimension Européenne. Chapitre 3 établi par Birzea, Strasbourg. DECS/SE/Sec (96) 7 prov.
- Conseil de l'Europe (1996b) Un enseignement secondaire pour l'Europe. Rapport final sur la Dimension Européenne. Chapitre 1 préparé par Dominique Barthelemy. Strasbourg. DECS/SE/Sec (96) 9 prov.
- Conseil de l'Europe (1996c) Un enseignement secondaire pour l'Europe. Conférence finale. Quel enseignement secondaire pour une Europe en mutation? Tendances, enjeux et perspectives. La dimension européenne: rapport de synthèse. Rédigé par Barthélémy, Ryba, Bîrzéa et Leclerq. Strasbourg, DECS/SE/Sec (96) 40.
- Cort P (2014) Europeanisation of curricula in Europe: Policy and practice. Eur Educ Res J 13(5):595–600. doi:10.2304/eeerj.2014.13.5.595
- Diestro Fernández A (2010) El papel de la Conferencia permanente de ministros europeos de la educación en el establecimiento de una política educativa europea. Foro de Educación 12(8):45–69, <http://forodeeducacion.com/ojs/index.php/fde/article/view/104/59> Accessed 13 November 2014
- Diestro Fernández A. (2011) La Dimensión Europea en la Educación: Análisis comparado de su desarrollo en perspectiva Supranacional. Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Tesis doctoral inédita
- Diestro Fernández A, y García-Blanco M (2012) La política educativa del Consejo de Europa. Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Comparada 3:45–63, <http://www.saece.org.ar/relec/revistas/3/art4.pdf> Accessed 13 November 2014
- Diestro Fernández A. y Valle López JM. (2015) Towards a European Supranational Policy of Education based on the European Dimension on Education. Bordón. Revista de Pedagogía, 67(1):101–116
- European Commission (2013) Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe, 2013th edn. Eurydice Report, EU, Luxembourg, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/151EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/151EN.pdf) Accessed 1 November 2014
- Foucher M (1995) Las nuevas caras de Europa. Consejo de Europa, Estrasburgo
- Frazier C. (1997) L'éducation et l'Union Européenne, Revue du Marché Commun et de l'Union Européenne, 410:476-491.
- Janne H. (1973) Pour une politique communautaire de l'éducation. Rapport présenté à la Commission Européenne. Bulletin des Communautés Européennes. Supplément 10/73.
- Keating A, Ortloff DH, Philippou S (2009) Citizenship education curricula: The changes and challenges presented by global and European integration. J Curric Stud 41(2):145–158. doi:10.1080/00220270802485063
- Keating A (2014) Education for citizenship in Europe. Pallgrave-Macmillan, London
- Ryba R (1995) Unity in diversity: The enigma of the European dimension in education. Oxf Rev Educ 21(1):25–36. doi:10.1080/0305498950210102
- Titz JP (1995) El proyecto educación continua del Consejo de Europa. Revista Europea de Formación Prof 6:45–49
- Valle López JM (2006) La Unión Europea y su política educativa. MEC-CIDE, Madrid