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2019

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/93606/>

MPRA Paper No. 93606, posted 02 May 2019 11:26 UTC

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EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND THE NEED TO REVIEW TRADITIONS IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO LABOUR MARKET DEMANDS

Abstract: This article attempts to present the challenges facing modern educational systems in the EU, and particularly that of Bulgaria, and which are the result of the dynamics of both the digital epoch, and a labour market without borders. The paper brings forward arguments in favour of reviewing and reconsidering the concept of educational policies addressing adequate employee skills for a competitive labour market. Conclusions and suggestions are made on the basis of research into the national regulatory framework and the recommendation of EESC.

Key words: education, labour market, qualification of workers and employees

Introduction

Nowadays education has long become a priority for governments and respectively, the educational system is a major factor for an economic and social advancement. At the same time, the educational system within the EU is founded on principles that combine the traditions of the particular country [3, pp.217-229, 4, pp. 226-238, 5, pp. 93-98], with the innovations corresponding to the European Union priorities.

The educational system has been a focus of attention both on the part of national institutions and the European ones, in view of the significant role it plays in the development of the economy and society [6, pp. 349-357].

The European Union pays a great deal of attention to providing education that corresponds to the demands of the present day. No strict uniform model can be enforced in this area, having in mind the historical differences, traditions and cultural achievements of individual member states. Nevertheless, with the objective of creating certain unity of educational models, several major principles of education within the EU have been adopted, so as to be applied by all member states, and namely: quality of education, education that is accessible to everyone; lifetime education. Articles 149 and 150 of the European Community Treaty outline the basic activities concerning assisting and supplementing the work of member states: encouraging mobility; developing cooperation between schools and universities; improving the system of degree recognition and other.

Throughout the different periods issues of education have always been objects of EU policies. The aim is to build a dynamic, open and flexible labour market for young people; a market with the suitable resources to create more and better jobs, high quality learning results and a better match between demand and supply of skills, including through the dissemination of the “learn through work” model across Europe. The activity framework is based on existing as well as new

practices related to the four priorities outlined: training, mobility, employment and entrepreneurship. Over the last few decades EU policies have aimed to:

- Achieve a high employment rate and strong social protection;
- Improve living and working conditions;
- Preserve the social cohesion and envisage new models of social and legal protection [8, pp. 37-48].

The EU strives to encourage social advancement and improve the living and working conditions of European peoples — see the preamble to the Treaty on the Functioning of EU¹.

The scientific objective of this paper is to attempt to present the challenges facing contemporary educational systems within the EU. These challenges stem from the dynamism of the current digital age, as well as from a labour market without borders. As a member state since 2007, Bulgaria is directly committed to all policies of the union, those in the educational sphere included. The time we live in is marked by dynamic processes and close interconnection within them, all these characteristics developing faster than our capacities to predict them. Digitalization is one of these processes, which have influenced social relationships in a way that has found institutions unprepared to face the challenges entailed. The process of digitalization calls for a societal response concerning the labour market availability of workers with the corresponding qualifications and skills.

The present paper, therefore, justifies the need for reviewing policies, including those aimed at the different educational levels, so that these are directed towards adequate skills workers need in order to be competitive at the labour market. Conclusions and suggestions are made, based on analysis of certain aspects of the regulatory framework of Bulgaria and EESC recommendations.

In order to achieve their objective, the authors set themselves the following **tasks**:

- To justify the need for reviewing educational system models in the European Union, and that of Bulgaria, in particular;
- On the basis of the analysis performed to bring forward generalizations, conclusions, criticism and suggestions.

To achieve the goal and complete the scientific tasks of the paper, the authors use the established methods of legal research.

Exposition

Education is the focus of attention on the part of European institutions. The areas of education and training play a strategic role for the future of every member state, as well as the Union as a whole. We live in a world that is rapidly changing at rates that require institutions' joint efforts at an international level and support at the national level, in order to meet the expectations of the public for stability of education and competitiveness at the labour market, respectively.

Demographic factors, technologies and innovations are but a few of the processes that influence the dynamism and volatility of the labour market. Individual states cannot grasp and limit these processes on their own; in this situation they are required to join their efforts to predict the changes and develop political measures for introducing them quickly and adequately in their own educational systems.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=157&langId=bg>

All member states endeavor is in unison with the common idea to adequately respond to a future, which is digital, innovative and unpredictable.

In the sphere of education and professional training policies are defined by member states, with the EU only having an auxiliary, though key role, through supporting the efforts to modernize educational systems. In view of the fact that certain challenges are common, for example, skills deficits in the labour force or ageing populations, joint actions and sharing good practices are necessary. [2, pp. 131-138]. A number of measures have been taken on a European level. On the one hand we have the European Centre for Professional Training Development, created as a decentralized EU agency. On the other, different skills programs are adopted, such as Erasmus in the fields of education and training in the period 2014-2020; work is being done about the automatic mutual recognition of higher education diplomas, as well as years of studying and training abroad, concrete recommendations are being made to every member state regarding priority reforms ("Europe 2020" strategy). The Europass System, an internet-based information system, was created, as well as national Europass centres to encourage the documenting of skills and qualifications, as an EU mechanism designed to improve the understanding and transparency about skills and qualifications.

The problems of transforming the educational system are complex ones. In the present paper's context, we shall emphasize the support that has to be provided, in order to adjust the labour force to the new economic environment.

To achieve this joint efforts are necessary on the part of the concrete member state governments, the social partners and the civil society.

The underlying principles of Bulgarian labour legislation can encourage this dialogue. In the norm of article 2 of the Labour Code (LC) there lies the principle of social dialogue², **according to which** the government regulates labour relations, as well as those directly proceeding from them, such as insurance relationships and matters of living standards, following consultations and dialogue with the workers, employees, employers and their respective organizations in the spirit of cooperation, mutual concessions and respect for the interests of each party [1, pp. 82-87].

With the relevant recommendations and certain adaptation to the present reality this principle can contribute towards the introduction of the necessary dynamics in the process of education and training, so that the needs of the society are met.

What matters in the process of educational systems transformation is both the concrete steps and the interaction between the subjects at each stage, as well as proper coordination. It is the **starting point** that determines success. And in this case, the starting point is preparing forecasts for the future structure of the labour market.

This is the stage when joint responsibility is shared between theory and practice, between the doctrine established in various spheres of knowledge and the social partners. Executive authorities in the country should join the process at each of its stages, in as far as they are part of the common administrative system of the EU and

² The social dialogue principle is covered in the Labour Code and also in the Law on settling industrial conflicts. It was originally created with the idea to regulate relationships within various industries should conflicts arise, and settle these peacefully. There are four forms of social dialogue, among which the present exposition focuses on the tripartite cooperation, where the government cooperates with the representative trade unions, and associations of employers on certain labour-related issues.

are thus expected to transfer and further develop at a national level the experience the EU has accumulated.

At labour legislation level a number of amendments to sources of norms are possible, so that employers and respectively workers are stimulated to actively participate in the process of lifetime education and training, the objective being maximally matching demand and supply.

At present the LC contains norms that enable the following: agreement on acquiring a qualification (art.229 of LC), employment contract including terms and conditions of in-company training (art.230 of LC), internship contract (art.233b of LC) and other. However, these regulations have proved to be insufficient, as employers do not seem to have the necessary incentives, and respectively the motivation to apply the norms. In practice employers would rather directly hire the workers and employees with the right skills and competences and not burden themselves with training and teaching entry-level staff. This in turn results in a volatility of the labour market and hence, certain insecurity for experienced employees of advanced age, who are not prepared for the challenges new technologies pose and the need to adapt old skills.

In this connection a recommendation can be made to introduce tax incentives for employers who invest in training their staff. Labour legislation at a national level, as well as collective employment agreements could prescribe in detail the rights and obligations of subjects of legal employment relationships relating to education and training.

A tripartite cooperation between the government, employers' representatives and trade unions is a tradition in Bulgaria. At present, the government should step back from its position of a major regulator of social relationships in labour and education, and, instead, expand the scope of tripartite cooperation. Lifelong learning, acquiring higher qualification and requalification should turn into priority and a responsibility for the subjects of the tripartite cooperation.

In this context support should be given at a doctrinal level for the EESC stand³ as expressed by Miglena Angelova:" In order for people to have opportunities for better professional development, they should be actively supported, informed and advised, by using the methods of mentoring, coaching and consulting about how to make an informed choice of the kind of education and training that will provide the skills and competences the labour market demands.

Social partners should play an active role and focus their attention on the respective issues, as well as suggest possible solutions."

Conclusion

The present paper is merely an attempt to transfer onto a legal doctrine level the need for changes in the educational systems of the EU and the member states. This study does not claim to be exhaustive or comprehensive; it is only the foundation for the authors' future scientific endeavors in the field of education, training and their commitment to the needs of a dynamic labour market.

Classical principles of labour law are the foundation stones of Bulgarian internal legislation and make the perfect basis for upgrading norms according to new

³ EESC, Section "Employment, social issues and citizenship"

Supportive educational systems to overcome the mismatch between skills supplied and demanded – what kind of transition is necessary

needs. Educational models should be dynamic and adequate to the processes taking place. This is a prerequisite for the close connection to be maintained between the work of various levels of educational institutions, government authorities, employers and the employees themselves. The process of qualification and training should be a continuous one and should be provided for not only in the regulatory framework of the national law, but also by sources that are not state-owned, yet are closer to the particular subjects and can therefore more accurately register needs and be more likely to respond to change in a flexible manner.

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