"How European Integration is Eroding National Control over Education Planning and Policy"

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ABSTRACT

In Europe, the history of education was mixed up with the history of nation-states until the Second World War. Even though the educational systems have remained within state competence, the project of harmonization of policies appeared at the end of the 60s with the construction of Europe. It aimed to protect the European continent from extreme nationalism. This willingness to make the national structures converge toward a single model on the European level was given concrete expression with the creation of a “European area of education and lifelong learning,” which was the result of the Bologna and Copenhagen process at the end of the 90s. This article focuses on the evolution of the national educative systems and on the modes of intervention which were used by the super-national and international organizations in order to make these systems converge. The argument which is defended here is the states' gradual relinquishment, which is to be interpreted as the acceptance of this i...
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Abstract

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The influence of Europe on its members’ education and formation policies

On every continent, educational systems are considered the exclusive responsibility of states. Even more, in Europe the history of teaching merged with that of nation-states until the Second World War. It was in order to protect the continent from nationalist excesses that the proposal was then made in Europe to harmonize educational policies. The purpose of this article is to present both the evolution of individual national systems and the modes of intervention by super-national and international organizations in order to help the various countries help these systems converge. The thesis defended here is that of a progressive consent by the different states to a kind of withdrawal, which will be interpreted as the expression of their acceptance of the de facto integration of differing national educational policies.

The “European space for education and life-long formation,” which was created by the Bologna and Copenhagen process, deny the sovereignty of governments in domains that remain formally within their competence. But it was an important stage marking the concretization of the European project for education. This moment had been prepared by repeated interventions within the educational systems; the harmonization of educational policies had indeed been advocated by enlightened spirits from the very beginning of European reconstruction. However, the objective was important but a half-century was needed for the various countries to agree on a common policy; many diverse methods had to be employed to convince states that their national systems should converge.
**Historic Milestones**

**1957 to 1985: Towards a Common Policy**

The Treaty of Rome that founded the European Community in 1957 made no reference to education. Professional formation was dealt with in articles 118 and 128, which charge the commission to define the general principles of a common policy and to promote strict collaboration between members in this area. The European authorities have used these two articles to put professional formation at the service of economic objectives, with the express wish of seeing it contribute to the harmonious development both of national economies and the common market.

The first initiatives were taken at the end of the 50s. The Commission “has been stressing the importance of the European and Community dimension in education since 1959 {and} since that time it has worked with organizations at the national and European level to promote better treatment of that dimension” (Petit 2002, p. 35). Starting with the 60s, it intervened in this area through information campaigns and by the creation of European schools. In 1963, ten general principles were adopted with the purpose of achieving a common policy on professional formation in the six countries that then made up the European community. Their validity was challenged by the states which feared that they limited their competence on a matter of social policy. At the same time, “the impossibility of achieving the free circulation of workers without a common policy on professional formation led to the adoption of the ten principles (which) define ... the criteria of a scholastic policy that aimed at achieving common economic objectives” (Vaniscotte 1990, p. 117). Even if these principles dealt only with professional formation, their adoption had a cascading effect that went beyond that framework: problems of equivalent titles and the recognition of professional qualifications were able to be resolved only through a common policy that would also deal with initial formation. Finally, the putting in place of a common policy of education was raised to the status of a major cultural objective starting in the 60s. From that moment, communitarian authorities have not neglected any occasion to recall that it was the indispensable condition for the emergence of a European consciousness. Thus, as Reguzzoni said, “the same reasons which had given birth to the European Economic Community were to create, through the participation of different peoples in the exercise of power, the political Community” (Vaniscotte 1990, p. 315).

It was nevertheless necessary to wait until 1971 for the ministers of education of the member states to come to an agreement on the principle of a common program of action. In 1972, at the inauguration of the European University Institute at Florence, the vice-president of the commission declared that “a policy of culture and education ought to be put into operation in the European Community as rapidly as possible” (Petit 2002, p. 8). The report, “Toward a European education policy,” edited in 1973 by Henri Janne at the request of the European Commission, points out the tone of the reforms and assigns priority to higher education. An education committee was created in 1974 to prepare the position of the different ministers. The work of preparation whose various stages are recalled below was concretized by the adoption of a first resolution on education, June 6, 1974. Even though it was extremely cautious, affirming that “the harmonization of systems and policies should not be
considered an end in itself,” it advocates the intensification of cooperation between institutions, the recognition of time spent in studies spent abroad, and the mobility of students and professors (European Commission 1974). The text says nothing about how these objectives should be pursued, leaving complete freedom to the national authorities. In February 1976 a second resolution confirmed these priorities and inserted them in an action program (European Commission 1976). It was in the course of the same year that a pilot program of university exchanges was launched (Megie & Ravinet 2004, p. 15). These two resolutions were of decisive importance, establishing the objectives that cooperation between nations in the area of education pursued in the following decades.

**1985 to 2000: The weakening of juridico-political constraints**

Until 1985 no legal provision authorized the Commission to intervene in regard to policies of teaching. By including higher studies in the field of professional formation in which it was authorized to intervene, the Gravier ruling of February 13, 1985 provided a juridical basis for the initiatives of the European Commission. A year later, in February 1986, the signing of the special Act further reinforced its legitimacy to act in the area of higher education. Even if the parliamentary proposition to treat teaching explicitly was rejected (Vaniscotte 1990, p. 118), it introduced the word “university” into the Treaty of Rome, which it strengthened “through the inclusion of measures relating to the importance of economic and social cohesion” (European Commission 1994, p. 9). It is from this moment that the European authorities uncovered the means of developing the human resources necessary for achieving the common market. Thus the years 1987 to 1990 were marked by the launching of communitarian programs, including Erasmus, which aimed at supporting student mobility through a system of credits ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) that it tried out and validated, and which today constitutes one of the axes of the Bologna process. The institutional schema was also made specific, the “Memorandum on teaching in higher education of the European Community” defined the role of the Commission as that of a “catalyzing agent facilitating common action and cooperation with regard for the principle of subsidiarity, while recognizing the diversity of systems” (European Commission 1991).

The question of education maintained an important place in the public debate on the construction of Europe with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which instituted the European Union and established the free circulation of goods, services, and people. Although this treaty reaffirmed national sovereignty over educational systems, its article 126, by virtue of which “the Community contributes to the development of “quality education” authorized Europe to intervene in a supportive way. From that moment economic and educational policies became more and more closely linked in the rhetoric of the Community. For example, “the white book on competition, growth and employment” (1993) explicitly emphasizes education and formation in order to stimulate growth (European Commission, 1993). Since the time had not yet arrived at harmonization, “it was better to agree on the mutual recognition of diplomas and periods of study than to standardize educational systems whose diversity is a cultural richness worthy of preservation” (Vaniscotte 1990, p. 21). Three new programs were launched at this time in order to increase
knowledge of the different systems: SOCRATES, aimed among other things to improve the comparability and compatibility of the various systems of education; and Leonardo da Vinci and Youth, which hoped to establish ties between initial and ongoing formation (European Commission 1994).

After 2000: the time of consolidation

In March 2000 the European Council meeting at Lisbon gave the Union the objective of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010. Forty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which did not even mention it, education had come to occupy a central place in the discourse and practices of the Union, to the point of being perceived from then on as the keystone of the whole process of integration. At the Lisbon summit, the heads of state expressed their wish for “an ambitious program aimed at modernizing systems of social security and education,” even while these domains continued to remain part of national prerogatives. In 2001, responding to their appeal, the Council assigned to higher education three strategic objectives to be reached by 2010, dealing with quality, accessibility, and openness to the world. These objectives have been confirmed by the working program “Education and Formation 2010,” adopted by the European Council of Barcelona in 2002, which has moreover recommended putting the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) into operation. Officially introduced at the Lisbon Summit in 2000, this method offers the Commission new possibilities for intervention in the domain of education. Its guiding principles are simple: the objectives and the calendar of actions leading to accomplish them were established by the representatives of the countries that were united at the heart of the Council; the directives lines that result from this approach are translated into national and regional policies; the progress achieved is measured in a regular manner by both qualitative and quantitative indicators; periodical evaluations permit each significant part to compare its evolution to that of others and to choose good practices. The document put out by the Commission in 2004, “European benchmarks in education and training: follow-up to the Lisbon European Council,” presents five reference points that the Council adopted in May 2003: to reduce to no more than 10% the average proportion of early school leavers; to increase by at least 15% the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology; to ensure that at least 85% of 22 year olds have completed upper secondary education; to decrease by at least 20% compared to the year 2000 the percentage of low-achieving 15 years old in reading literacy; to ensure that the at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25 to 64 age group) has taken part in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2004a, p. 14). These objectives were accompanied by 29 indicators that would make it possible to analyze the progress realized in each country.


This rapid historical survey shows that the influence of the European Commission on national policies for education and formation was reinforced in a progressive manner. Until then, it had never been a question of harmonizing them because the legal texts, both national and international, affirm that teaching remains an area of competence reserved to states, and that .the only possible way forward, therefore,
was to convince them that it was in their interest to have their educational policies converge. It is to this end that the Commission deployed its arsenal of identification and development of good practices, along with support for experiences that it judged positive. Starting in 1998, initiatives aiming to bring together the national systems of higher education and the teaching of professional formation began to multiply in Europe and on other contingents. The process of Bologna, Copenhagen, and of long-term professionalization, which all resulted from a “bottom up” construction are the most significant of these developments.

**The Bologna Process**

In May 1998 the Ministers of Higher Education from France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom signed the Sorbonne declaration by which they announced their project to “harmonize the architecture of the European system of higher education.” This text, which invited the other countries of Europe to join them, led to the declaration of Bologna of May 1999, in which twenty-nine countries expressed their desire to create a “European higher education area (EHEA).” The term “harmonization” no longer appeared in the Bologna declaration, it had been eliminated by those states which did not intend to renounce any part of their responsibility for their education system to the benefit of Europe. The text fixes six objectives, which the various countries commit themselves to attain by 2010: organizing higher studies in two cycles; the reinforcement of mobility; putting in place a system of transferable credits; improvement of the readability and comparability of diplomas; the evaluation of quality; and the promotion of the European dimension of teaching. These objectives were reaffirmed at the Prague summit of June 2001 where thirty-two countries were represented, and the reform of higher education was placed in a perspective of life-long education and formation. The Berlin summit of September 2003 brought together representatives of forty countries who refined certain technical aspects of the proposal without changing its spirit. During the meeting which was held in Bergen in May 2005, 45 countries assessed the progress made, halfway in the process, by the European area of the higher education and the priorities for 2010 were settled. The ministers wished that a strategy be worked out to be able to collaborate with the other parts of the world. The Bologna process establishes a framework of cooperation between the various states, one that is growing more precise from summit to summit. Agreements are based on free consent: at the outset Claude Allègre, the French minister of education, invited his three colleagues to adopt a common declaration which might help each of them resolve problems presented by the structuring its national teaching. Other countries then freely joined the process, in greater number and more rapidly than its promoters had hoped (Charlier & Croché 2004). Among the reasons which may explain this suspicious over zealousness, it is appropriate to list the action of international and super-national organizations. In October 1998 the ministers of education of the countries of the European Union affirmed their interest in this step and expressed their regrets for not having been invited to Paris. As for the European Commission, it immediately supported the process by asking for the report on the status of higher teaching in Europe, which helped to prepare the Bologna summit of 1999, which became the permanent pivot and central actor in the follow-up group.
from “the Bologna process,” established in Prague in 2001. Other organizations that have been working for some time to bring together the different national systems of higher education have only obtained a consultative voice in this group: the European Council, which adopted the first “European convention to deal with the equivalence of diplomas that offer entry to universities” in 1953, was charged with establishing a link between those countries that were already involved in the process and those invited to join them; and UNESCO, which multiplied initiatives that greatly widened the recognition of degrees, was integrated into the group by virtue of its European Center for Higher Education (CEPES). It is also on a consultative basis that organizations representing categories of important actors in this area have been admitted: the EUA (European University Association), the ESIB (European Students International Bureau), and EURASHE (European Association of Institutions of Higher Education). The ongoing group is presided over by whatever country presides over the European Union, which separates it from those who are not part of the Union, while the presiding country has the right to initiate meetings and decide which organisms are invited to summit gatherings. The Bologna process establishes a “conceptual participative model” (Van Haecht 2004, p. 8) in which the workings of power are no longer defined in terms of national frontiers and where the distinction between state and non-state-related actors is no longer pertinent. The countries that joined this process accepted the coordination of their policies for higher education without the existence of any text compelling them to do so.

**The Copenhagen Process**

In October 2001 the director-generals of professional formation of the European Union, meeting at Bruges, affirmed their desire to raise the quality of professional formation in order to improve the competitiveness of the European economy and reinforce the mutual recognition of competences and qualifications among its members. This process was ratified by the Council in March 2002, when it expressed the hope that “actions along the lines of the Bologna process, but adapted to the areas of teaching and professional formation,” should be launched. Meeting again at Copenhagen in November 2002, the representatives of thirty-one European countries defined a common strategy whose first effects were evaluated at Maastricht in December 2004. This reflection was greatly influenced by mid-term evaluation reports on the progress that had been accomplished in relation to the Lisbon strategy. Prepared by Wim Kok in 2003 and 2004, these reports are extremely critical; they emphasize that “an overburdened program,” “insufficient coordination,” and “divergent priorities” account for the weakness of the results that were gathered (European Commission 2003a; European Commission 2004c). The text adopted at Maastricht, therefore, aims to make the systems dynamic; it advocates that links be established between teaching and professional formation and general procedures, within the perspective of life-long education.

Put in place in 2002 at Copenhagen, the coordinating group established to follow this process is composed of representatives of the various nations and their European social partners, presided over by a representative of the European Commission (European Commission 2003b).
The process of establishing lasting professionalization

In November 2000 the ministers responsible for professional teaching in France, Germany, Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, and Hungary signed a declaration that expresses their common desire to renovate their systems and bring their national policies into alignment (Cedefop 2002, p. 1). Their proposal, which was called “lasting professionalization,” unlike that of Bologna, does not try to replace existing diplomas but to create new ones, on the level of “bac plus two,” which would be a way of completing the offer of existing formation. The dynamic of lasting professionalization began with a less impressive rhythm than that of Bologna, with a second meeting bringing ministers of twelve countries together in Paris on February 2002. This was followed by seminars organized with the purpose of ending those curricula that lead to primary professional European diplomas and establishing the calendar of meetings in which ministers would report to their peers regarding the developments of the process in their country.

This process of enduring professionalization was launched by the French minister Mélenchon, who made clear he had been inspired by the Bologna process and had used the open method of coordination (Mélenchon 2002, p. 2). The process was approved by the European Commission whose follow-up group became as firmly integrated as those of the process of Bologna and Copenhagen.

The regulation of initiatives: the role of the Commission

The simultaneity of the process we are analyzing and the support given it by international organizations are not the result of chance. In effect, these developments are the outcome of a half-century of work achieved in great part by the European Commission, but also by the Council of Europe, the OCDE, UNESCO, and OIT, which hoped to facilitate comparisons and bring systems together on a regional if not world-wide basis (Charlier and Croché 2004). Hence the success of the Bologna process was established as a model for the two others, which reproduced its technical aspects in the hope of encouraging the same enthusiasm.

This being so, the somewhat wild multiplication of harmonization processes in various parts of the educational systems raises the question of at what point authority would be given to coordinate those reforms that were inspired by it. The Bologna process foresees that the first cycle of higher teaching would be three years, and the cycle of enduring professionalization hoped to establish two-year programs of formation. Reorientation programs between the two systems had not been established, since these processes are partly competitive, making practical proposals regarding their results incompatible.

This disorder can be interpreted as a logical effect of the way in which the OMC was established: since decisions are taken by representatives whose choices are influenced by their position in the educational scheme of things, they may well turn out to be contradictory or incompatible. The Commission is the only organization which has a place in the planning organs of the three processes, and opposes any lack of integration: “the case for unintegrated parallel action will be increasingly weaker in the future, be it in higher education or in vocational training, unless it is manifestly more ambitious and more effective” (European Commission 2003c, p. 16). Integration
will be accomplished only by providing one body with the authority to impose specific indicators on the directive organs of the different processes, a situation which tends to radically change the spirit of the open method of coordination that all three make use of. Today the omnipresence of the Commission clearly makes it capable of assuming this role, but the states have not completely clarified their wish to hand it over to them. The evolution inaugurated after WW2 has not been completed; it most likely will imply a transfer of powers that the Commission will find it opportune to complete without delay in order to be able “to define truly coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, ensuring effective interaction between all the links of the learning chain” (ibid., p. 4). The Commission sees itself as occupying an central position in the regulation of education and formation policies which are developed on a European level, and “proposes that the member states submit to it each year as from 2004 a consolidated report on all the actions they take on education and training that can contribute to the Lisbon strategy” (ibid., p. 17). The articulation of these reports along with those that the States compile for European policies on employment and social advancement “would represent a considerable step forward in increasing the impact and efficiency of the open coordination method in education and training” (ibid., p. 17). Under this new model, the mutual control of States would be completed if not replaced by that of the Commission, which “could analyze these reports and produce an annual document containing useful observations for all actors and decision-makers” (ibid, p. 17).

Without waiting, the Commission established a systematization and amplification of its actions with regard to systems of education and formation. It adopted an “action program integrated in the area of life-long education and formation,” which, endowed with a budget of 13.6 billion euros for the period 2007-2013, is tripling the amount spent on education and formation in today’s programming. It proposes an overall strategy of education and life-long formation that aims to accomplish the goals of Lisbon by acting simultaneously on teaching in the schools (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), professional formation (Leonardo Da Vinci), and teaching for adults (Grundtvig) (European Commission 2004d). The Commission intends to integrate earlier programs within a coherent strategy, notably by drawing on the processes of Bologna and Copenhagen through which it hopes to develop synergies by means of its “Education and Formation 2010” program (TWG 2003, p. 19). The aim is to establish a coherent European “meta-cadre” of credits and qualifications, related to a “typology” of knowledge, aptitudes/tasks and competences. The European Commission hopes that in a reasonable amount of time the system of credits in the area of teaching and professional formation (ECVET) would be integrated with that of the ECTS and be applied on national, regional, European, and international levels (European Commission 2004b, p. 7). During the conference where the ministers of higher education met in Bergen in May 2005, the Commission stated that there was "an obvious link between the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process" and that it had taken "several initiatives to establish synergies between both processes in important field such as transparency of qualifications (Europass), Credit transfer, Quality Assurance and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)" (European Commission 2005, p. 1). Its objective is to create perfectly compatible tools, which is
obviously to the advantage of European students and can only strengthen its leadership with pilot groups that are emerging out of the various coordination processes of education and formation.

It is undeniable that the Commission is intervening more and more in the education and formation policies of states without provoking significant negative reactions. Nevertheless, it is not certain that citizens are ready to approve an official transfer of control from the various countries to Europe. The “proposal of a treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe” shows the reticence of their representatives, who have believed it advisable, contrary to the evidence of a long evolution, to reaffirm the sovereignty of the different states over educational policy. This policy nevertheless is merely rhetorical, since the constitutional proposal in effect proposes to give the Union the legal means to intervene in educational policies. It does this by inventing a new category of competences, distinct from those that are exclusive or shared, “spheres of support action, coordination, and assistance” that are part of education and professional formation, and by permitting the Council of Ministers of the Union to intervene by means of a European law or a European framework law “to the exclusion of every harmonization of legislative and procedural arrangements of the member states” (articles 282 and 283). The two legal instruments that the constitutional proposal wishes to place at the disposition of the Council are powerful: European law is to apply automatically among all its member states; European framework law establishes the results to be attained by allowing national operators the responsibility of choosing the means that are appropriate to arriving at them. If these articles should be ratified by the states, they would give the Union the technical legal means, which it has not hitherto possessed, for acting in the sphere of education (Weber 2004).

The new mode of governance

Until now the systems of education and formation, their didactic contents and adjustment, have remained the competence of states. The common decisions adopted on the European level are nevertheless taking on more and more importance, and tend to determine the essential norms within which national specifications are able to operate. History shows that the European Commission has used diverse methods, in the course of the last decades, to encourage states to align their policies. Its action is allied with that of the Council, in which every country is represented. Nothing, therefore, is formally imposed on a country, but they are subject to encouragements and stigmatizations that can be powerful. Concretely, the major processes that were adopted all function according to the same principles; countries ought to place their confidence in them and be prepared to submit policies for education and formation to the evaluation of European authorities and their peers that is, the representatives of the other associated states. Evaluation of the achievements of each country is carried out through reports compiled or financed by the Commission, which by its choices serves to orient the methods and criteria of evaluation in the direction it considers desirable, hence acting indirectly on the evolution of the entire process. A policy is thereby put in place which combines assigning responsibility to the different countries for the efficiency of the methods they adopt to achieve the reforms.
that have been decided on with the de facto absence of responsibility in regard to the overall objectives pursued by these reforms.

This manner of acting on national educational policies is inscribed in the principles of the OMC. The latter creates a body of rules “which are juridically non-binding” but “politically appealing.” The “soft law” of open coordination and the “hard law” of European legislation complement each other. The OMC limits legislative work for the benefit of agreements accepted by the states which also indicates that it helps to eliminate political debate. The use of the OMC in the area of education means that decisions taken are henceforth the work of international experts and no longer have anything but a technical content (Dale 2004). Mosher underlines that all partners do not have the same weight in defining the content of the agreements arrived at in the name of the OMC: “the generally voluntarist nature of the mandates may leave weak actors subject to exploitation by strong actors when member states decide on implementation, even when the mandates are intended to help weak actors.” He adds “that possibly the most important political reason for the expansion of open coordination is that may allow domestic actors to shift political blame for unpopular measures to the EDU, without having to shift real control” (Mosher 2000).

The OMC shows itself effective only of it is accompanied by tacit threats, as the Commission regularly reminds us. According to its diagnostic, the teaching systems of Europe are seriously challenged by those of other continents, a situation which has only negative repercussions on competitiveness. Similarly, states that question their participation in the various European processes and try to avoid the constraints of integration will pay a high political price, and will be rejected by those ever more numerous countries that have become involved in this effort. Then appears an "obsidional culture" (culture of people under siege) that provides the background of all the reforms which were carried out by the OMC. The worry that the continent would be disqualified seems to have accompanied the development of a European identity (Campbell 1992); “Discourse about such identity always speaks of what is lacking, or of a supplement, thanks to which one would be fully what one is--but which one is not, because that can only be the case with that supplement” (Le Gloannec 1998, p. 119). This method has undoubtedly shown itself effective for the Bologna process, where individual states have become the technical executants of policies which are produced outside of them by means of interactions between a plurality of actors of different natures--governmental, intergovernmental, transnational, and supranational institutions, which radically transform the rules of political action, without respecting either traditional strategies or established hierarchies. In every country the transformations involved are justified by the urgent obligation to enlist in the evolution of Europe, and nations are then summoned to have the condition of their reforms evaluated by their peers.

Prepared for a considerable time by international organisms and professional associations, the Bologna process was begun on the initiative of four relatively equal countries -France, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany-, which by themselves had more than 50% of the students in the European Union. It is probable that if its initiators did not wish to be joined by other partners in the first stages of the process, it was to
avoid seeing it immediately changed. Successive enlargements to other countries of the Union as well as outside the Union were accomplished while respecting an orthodoxy defined by the founding countries. Today the European processes of Bologna and Copenhagen and of enduring professionalization extend beyond the frontiers of the European Union; they have become integrated in other European countries and arouse interest even outside the continent. The Bologna process has been pointed out as an example of good practice by UNESCO, OCDE, and the European Commission, encouraging leaders of non-European countries to consider it as a model for the reform of their systems of higher education. The process of lasting professionalization has attracted leaders in China, Brazil and Mexico. With these processes for the reform of teaching and formation, Europe is opening itself to a world without limits. The question that presents itself, therefore, is that of its capacity to not reduce these processes simply to technical mechanisms but to make them tools for the diffusion of a particular cultural and social conception. The problem did not exist or had hardly any importance, when these processes were followed only by countries that shared common histories. It becomes more pertinent when these processes become capable of being borrowed by partners with radically different backgrounds.

Conclusion

Back on May 9, 1950 Schuman declared that “Europe will not be made in one blow nor through a single overall construction; it will be created by concrete realizations that first create a de facto solidarity (Shuman 1950). Europe’s “founding fathers” had a long-term vision and saw “the first stage of European federation” in “concrete realizations.” The history of Europe is thus full of “acts that are sui generis” (Bertrand 2002, p. 22), capable of creating the effects of laws, such as the communications and white books of the Commission, that present analyses which hope to extend European integration, including in those areas that remain within the competence of member-states. The power of initiative with which the Commission is endowed makes it the authority that has been able to propose the most significant acts in the construction of Europe. Since the treaty of Rome, it has accumulated numerous and important prerogatives; the necessity for a single Market meant transferring to it everything that related to the functioning of markets and services, an operation that has in great part been achieved. “Its logic is to try to go still further, which places it at the center of all the contradictions which separate the member countries, (and) its power of conviction largely depends on its capacity to exercise its responsibilities better than the member countries” (Wyplosz 2004, p.11).

The European Union possesses a multiplicity of actors both public and private who participate in the formulation and establishment of public policies in areas that nevertheless remain of autonomous competence. In this framework, “...the role of states is paradoxically more crucial in the bosom of the European Union, even while their exclusive control over their domain is reduced, [...] the states are not enfeebled, and take on more importance in the collective exercise of their authority within the European Union, while losing it as exclusive administrators of their own territory” (Le Gloannec 1998, p. 109).
In the domain of education and formation Europe has been confronted by national identities that appear extremely varied and especially susceptible to exacerbation. The process has shown itself to be long and complex, the first steps have been timid, and it was less than thirty years ago that the plan to bring national education systems closer together was clearly announced. Since prudence was appropriate, experimentation took on a central role in the communitarian system: measures advocated by the European Commission are first tested by means of pilot projects before being integrated into a strategy whose formulation is constantly evolving. The system Erasmus/ECTS is a good example of this. It was launched in 1988 as a pilot project in several disciplines, extended to others in 1995 (Eurydice 2000, p. 158), and became totally integrated in national educational systems within the framework of the Bologna process. This way of proceeding eliminates political debate regarding the pertinent of the measure under consideration in order to leave room for exclusively technical considerations. Reasoning takes place within a framework that seems self-evident, although it is clearly not so at all, but is simply the product of experiments by the Commission. The political space in which one would be able to debate the pertinence of this framework is slow to emerge.

Notes

1. An archetypal example of this is given by the Ferry laws, adopted in France in the 1880s after being defeated by Prussia. Their purpose was to provide the country with a teaching system capable of imposing a single language and a national identity for the entire population.

2. The Court of Justice of the European Communities developed the notion of “relinquishment” to describe the states’ loss of sovereignty over certain of their policies, and to emphasize that the modifications of authority that result from it remain limited, since community action is led and controlled by the states (Bertrand 2002, p. 19).

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