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Back and Forth? 30 Years of Europeanization of the Education & Training Policy within the Public Policy Complex (1995-2025): A Critical Overview and the State-of-Play Policy Analysis

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze the long process of the Europeanization of the Education and Training Policy, since 1995, following the publication of the European Commissions' *White Paper* entitled "Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society." After briefly sketching the historical background, considering that prior to 1992 the EC had no legislative power in education, the paper focuses on the development of the European education policy within the EU Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010). It emphasizes the political agenda underpinning "E&T2010" Work Programme of the Lisbon Strategy, while also shedding light on the gradual over-determination of the European education policy by the Macro-economic Agenda, during that decade. The paper further proceeds in analyzing the EU policy on education and training within the framework of the EU2020 Strategy (2010-2020), as well as in the context of the interconnection between policy tools (within the OMC) and the political content (as mainly embedded in the benchmarks and the key indicators) of the EU education policy with the transformations in the labour market and the financial crisis repercussions. Last but not least, the ongoing developments and the new benchmarks and policy priorities of the strategic framework for the European cooperation in Education & Training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) are also examined, considering the impact of the Permacrisis and the Mega-Trends. The paper concludes with a critical review of the whole process of the Europeanization of the Education & Training Policy, as well as of its evolving relation to the public policy complex.

Keywords: Education & Training Policy, Europeanization, Lisbon Strategy, EU2020 Strategy, European Education Area, Permacrisis, Labour market, Macro-economic Agenda, Public Policy Complex

1. Introduction: Sketching the historical background

Prior to 1992, the EC had no legislative power in education, yet since 1992, according to Murphy, *"(EU) Member States gradually proceeded in ceding partial sovereignty over many areas of political decision making, including education, which were powerfully guarded as part of their legal dominion"* (Murphy, 2005, p. 127). They have proceeded in such a "willing surrender" (Held & McGrew, 1993, p. 272) in order to gain in competitiveness and growth. The move "towards supranationality by member states was due to an increasingly internationalized relationship between states and capital. The internationalization of the process of production and exchange has produced an internationalization of the state, or, in the European context, a form of political organization at the regional/supranational level" (Murphy, 2005, p. 124).

In fact, the gradual "loss of the international competitive advantage especially in the rapidly growing sectors" (Tsoukalis, 1993, p. 48) constituted a reliable threat for the EU and had remarkable impact in the existing public policy complex and affected the development of the Lisbon Strategy. Even during '90s, the changing global environment had undermined the possibility of successful national-level responses to the challenges of international competition, as well as put in doubt the reliance on Keynesian and welfarist policies, on which domestic political bargains had so heavily depended (Hurrell, 1995 as cited in Muprhy, 2005, p. 126). In fact, due to "the fragmentation of the economy, Europe was unable to

develop technologies on a competitive basis" (Murphy, 2005, p. 125) and subsequently to proceed in capacity building, accordingly. Given all the above mentioned, Life Long Learning (LLL) became a focal point of the whole EU developmental strategy for the decade 2000-2010, perceived as the institutional and operational umbrella for both Education and Training policy and practice, that could provide a new paradigm in HRD in order to increase competitiveness (European Commission, 2001; Papadakis & Drakaki, 2023).

The Lisbon Strategy (initiated in 2000 and ratified at the Stockholm Summit in 2001) came to propose an overall strategic framework as a response to the demands of the EU Member States for a Knowledge Society (more precisely for a Knowledge-based Economy), with main priorities being growth and jobs, lifelong learning as a leading feature and innovation as a vehicle for economic change, through the implementation of research initiatives (Keeling, 2006, p. 206). It was substantially influenced by the European Commission's "White Paper on Education and Training", published in 1995 (see analytically Papadakis, 1998).

The policy of the EU explicitly has turned toward a more pronounced neoliberal economic model where the important thing is to generate a free and competitive market to increase economic profits. The Lisbon Strategy had a tremendous impact on European educational policy" (Arriazu Muñoz, 2015, pp. 31, 33). The need for Lifelong Learning was defined, to a great extent, by the concern about the effectiveness of the traditional education systems at the national and supranational level (see Cowen, 2001, pp. 91-116).

2. Education & Training Policy within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy

The Lisbon Strategy (namely the major EU initiative towards a common public policy complex) and furthermore the Work Programme "Education and Training 2010" was set as the fundamental response of the EU Member States to the demands of the Knowledge Society and is considered a clear indication of the increasing internationalization of the Educational Policy (Papadakis & Drakaki, 2022). Prior to putting into discourse a policy agenda such as 'education policy in the EU member-states', it is necessary to explore the terms underlying it. Indeed, any attempt to analyse EU Policy in Education and Training cannot overlook the effects of the new forms of internationalisation. Globalisation -or more precisely internationalisation- as a phenomenon, is a focal point of several theoretical discussions. (Habermas, 1999a, p. 110).

Within the above-mentioned framework, Life Long Learning (LLL) was constantly modified, while it was re-designed, in favour of the supra-nationality in both the LLL policy planning and policy implementation. LLL was increasingly perceived as both a constant procedure and a constantly updated outcome, that should be contextually embedded in citizens' biokosmos and institutionally related with employability, competitiveness and sustainability. On all these grounds, policy-making in LLL has started to concern many aspects and facets of the human resourse development (HRD) and subsequently had a certain impact on the ongoing transitions in economy, society and the relevant decision-making processes (Papadakis, 2022). The safeguard of the economic sustainability terms of the Union and the recovery of its competitive advantage in the global economy inevitably led the Member States to the introduction of an actual supranationality, as the only means to achieve those goals. Within the new framework for the development of policies in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning, namely the Work Programme "Education & Training 2010" of the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission 2006b; Papadakis, 2007, pp. 755-780), supranationality came to guide many educational reforms at the national level (see European Commission, 2002, pp. 4-9).

Resources were mobilized, within the reform-driven agenda of the Lisbon Strategy, in order mainly to adapt education to the labour market demands and subsequently harmonize education reforms to economy and its needs, in terms of maximizing competitiveness (Arriazu Muñoz, 2015, pp. 32-34), while non-economic spheres were "saturated" with market

rationalities (Giroux, 2008, p. 57). The priority of the Lisbon Strategy, in terms of Education & Training, was the gradual shift to reskilling and, via this, further harmonization of education with the demands of the labour market and the economy (Papadakis & Drakaki, 2022). That, in essence, led to the gradual over-determination of a social policy (namely education policy - see analytically Tracy & Tracy-Dills, 1999, pp. 331-347), by the economic rationality, given both the ongoing State Retreat and the fact that the market seemed to be considered to operate as a quasi-*regulating circle* (see in detail Gravaris, 2005, pp. 27-50; Papadakis, 2006). It seems that, under the persistent and underlying (in both political discourse and practice) pressure to reform education in order to be harmonized to the needs of the economy and the market, within a framework of dominance of the economic competitiveness**, "***this pressure was experienced in two ways, as a result of pressures on the state, which has historically been massively imbricated with education, and changes in the expectations of education itself as a sector*" (Dale, 2007, p. 183).

Subsequently, the reform agenda, promoted through the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, has led to the gradual transformation of education policies into active employment policies (Lavdas et al. 2006, p. 132) and to the over-determination of education policy by the macro-economic agenda (Gravaris 2005, pp. 35, 46-48). In Panitsides' terms: "*adult education and lifelong learning have been conceptualized and propounded by international organizations with a strong human capital rationale (Schuetze, 2006; Moutsios, 2009). This wider policy consensus has turned lifelong learning into an active tool for the reform of education systems to tackle market mandates (Field, 2001)*" (Panitsides, 2015, p. 207). Under this scope, national governments were invited to proceed in national reforms with the use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in policy planning and implementation (see European Commission, 2002, pp. 10, 32, 35). In Jiri Krcek's terms "*the aim of the OMC was then to find a middle ground between policy diversity and policy convergence by establishing a cognitive arena as a means for spreading the best practice, while still allowing Member States to maintain their own structural arrangements*" (Krcek, 2013, p. 1). A typical example of the OMC lays on the development and implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme and more specifically in the use of policy tools (especially after 2004 when the Lisbon Strategy progress was evaluated and partially revised in terms of objectives, indicators and benchmarks and subsequently after the re-launch of the whole programme in 2005 under the brand new label 'Growth and Jobs' - see Bulmer, 2012, p. 36), such as: *clusters and peer learning activities (PLAs), coordination groups, thematic networks, university-business partnerships*, etc. (Papadakis, 2016).

Within this context, emphasis was laid on the development and reinforcement of skills through a continuous reskilling (Papadakis, 2006, pp. 98-100, 104-105, 127-139). I.e., Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) have been undertaken since 2005 mainly by clusters of countries sharing a common interest in a thematic priority. The Clusters have focused on several topics: modernisation of higher education; teachers and trainers; mathematics, science, and technology; access and social inclusion; key competences; ICT; and the recognition of learning outcomes. As a key tool in the OMC, peer learning was also used by the Adult learning working group and the University-Business Forum. The work of the clusters and PLAs was intended to contribute, on the one hand, to the initiation of the policy development process at the European level (reflection, ideas) and, on the other hand, to support national policy development and implementation of agreed European objectives and principles through mutual learning and exchange of good practice. To disseminate the results of E&T 2010 cooperation, and especially the results of peer-learning, the Commission has set up at special website, launched in 2009 (see analytically for the above-mentioned European Commission, 2006a, pp. 2-3; European Commission, 2006c, European Commission, 2006d; Papadakis, 2007, pp. 772-773; Papadakis, 2016, pp. 78-80). It should be noted at this point, that the overall coordination (in terms of technocracy) was carried out by the *Education & Training*

Coordination Group (ETCG), established in December 2005, in order to achieve better coordination and reduce implementation gap at the supranational level and compliance failures at the national (MS) level (Papadakis, 2007, pp. 771-772) and the *Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks/ SGIB* (Papadakis, 2007, pp. 772-773). The implementation and further development of the OMC in education and training have been carried out in close cooperation between the Member States and the Commission. The Education and Training Coordination Group (ETCG) has overseen the operational management and implementation of E&T 2010 in a lifelong learning perspective, while it was in charge of the coordination of the clusters (Papadakis, 2007, pp. 771-772).

Despite the resources mobilized, the Lisbon expectations in Education and Training weren't met in several cases. The Lisbon Strategy and subsequently the Work Programme "Education & Training 2010" did not achieve/ fulfill its objectives in the fields of Lifelong Learning, Education and Training. In fact, it met the objective just in one out of the five benchmarks, highlighting the key policy priorities (namely the one concerning MST graduates). The prevalence of the economic rationality in the public policy complex widened the existing institutional and regulatory asymmetries between the M-S (also see Lavdas, 2005), while the education policy was gradually over-determined by a quite monologic macro-economic agenda, aiming at competitiveness (Gravaris, 2005, p. 50; Papadakis & Drakaki, 2016, pp. 181-182). The perception of employability and reskilling (including the implicit adoption of a mismatch assumption) as a basic «tool» to address former and new unemployment challenges resulted in the perception of Training as the panacea (Papadakis, 2006) for tackling youth unemployment. That clearly did not work.

We should note at this point that the main priority of the Lisbon Strategy in education and training fields was Lifelong Learning itself, with emphasis on the participation of the 12,5% of people aged 25-64 on Lifelong Learning programmes until 2010 (European Commission, 2006b, p. 59). There were four other benchmarks (see Table 1 and European Commission, 2006b, pp. 58-59).

Table 1. Member-States' Progress towards Meeting the Five Lisbon Benchmarks for 2010 (2000-2010)

Lisbon Objectives	**EU Benchmarks for 2010**	**EU Average in 2010**
1. Early Leavers from education	Less than 10%	14.4%
2. Low achievers in reading literacy	17% (decrease at least 20%)	20%
3. Completion of Upper Secondary Education	85% (at least)	78.6%
4. Adult Lifelong Learning Participation	12.5%	9.3%
5. MST Graduates	Increase by 15%	More than 37.6% increase

Source: European Commission (2011a, pp. 12-16).

The other key priorities of the Lisbon Strategy included:

- The change of the "learning paradigm", throughout LLL, towards a competence-based learning with a simultaneous turn towards the learning outcomes, namely knowledge, competences, skills (Hoskins & Deakin Crick, 2008, pp. 3-5; Papadakis, 2016, p. 59).
- The actual development of the 8 key competences within the entire spectrum of Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2007, p. 3; Papadakis 2009a; Papadakis, 2009b).
- Emphasis on benchmarking, with a gradual turn from strict quantitative benchmarks towards composite indicators (Papadakis, 2016, p. 59).
- The establishment of common "European Indicators and Benchmarks" where possible and the simultaneous formation of reference criteria for each member-state referring to metacognitive competences, active citizenship, participation in adult education etc. (European Commission, 2002, pp. 3, 9-10, 18, 20, 23-26).
- The development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and subsequently of the National Qualification Frameworks (CEDEFOP, 2013, p. 12; Papadakis, 2006, pp. 110-112; Papadakis, 2007, pp. 767-768) and the subsequent prioritization of Vocational Education and Training.
- The "structuring of quality assurance systems" (Papadakis, 2006, p. 20).

Several of these "horizontal" objectives (such as the development of EQF, the shift to skills and subsequently the paradigm shift in education, the establishment of common "European Indicators and Benchmarks" etc) were achieved within the framework of the "Education & Training 2010" Work Programme of the Lisbon Strategy (Papadakis & Drakaki, 2016).

At the end of the day, the Lisbon Strategy succeeded in some fields, yet it did not fully achieve many of its key objectives-priorities (as imprinted in the 5 benchmarks) in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning (as well as in several other fields) (see Figure 1), showing the progress of Member-States with regard to the Lisbon objectives in the fields of education and training). In fact, the Lisbon Strategy has been self-undermined since the very beginning, while at the same time, it did not, at the end of the day, fully fulfill its objectives in the fields of Lifelong Learning, Education and Training (as well as in several other fields).

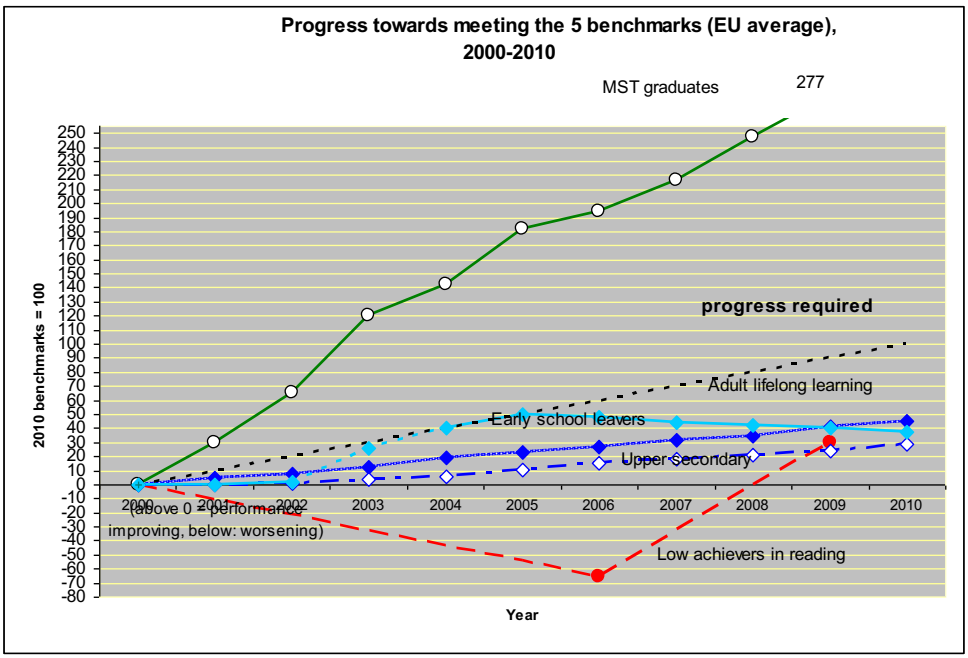

Figure 1. Progress towards the 5 benchmarks 200-2010

Source: European Commission (2011a, p. 11).

To conclude: When it comes to the Lisbon Strategy and its educational "branch", the combination of political maximalism and visionary superiority widened the institutional and regulatory asymmetries among the Member-States (Lavdas, 2005, p. 67). The sovereignty of specific economic values and consequently, the prevalence of economic rationality in the implementation of the strategy for Lifelong Learning in combination with the almost obsessive (in Krugman's terms) reference of all main policy initiatives to competitiveness created a quite monothematic agenda, influenced (in many cases) by neo-liberalism. As Pasias and Roussakis point out: "*the practices used for the accomplishment of this particular "Europe of Knowledge" seem to have been colonized by the neoliberal / technocratic rationales of "marketization", "privatization", "governmentality" and "performativity" rationalities put forward by international economic organizations (OECD, World Bank, IMF and WTO) and TNCs' (Lynch 2006, Ball 2009), which have a casting opinion on educational issues*" (Pasias & Roussakis, 2012, p. 183). The abovementioned agenda over-determined discursive practices and policy making. The constant appeal to reskilling (with the implicit adoption of a simplifying mismatch assumption) as a basic «tool» to cope with former and new unemployment, deterred a more holistic approach to the unemployment problem, while it led to the undermining of the social dimension of Education Policy (Papadakis & Drakaki, 2023).

3. The EU2020 Strategy for education and training (ET2020): Prevailing Trends and Priorities

The EU2020 Strategy was the successor of the Lisbon Strategy as, in essence and before the formal completion of the latter, the process of formulating the new EU strategy (more specifically the Europe2020 or EU2020 strategy), which was considered to be - right from its outset - a structural component of the EU Recovery Plan, had already started since 2009 (Papadakis, 2016, p. 91). In this framework, the initial planning stage and the first steps of the 'EU2020' implementation process in the fields of education and training, despite the strategy's major reform, have retained their focus on reskilling and have also emphasized the need for even greater flexibility and supranationalisation (Papadakis, 2016, p. 92).

The new EU2020 Strategy framework of 'quantifiable targets' related to Lifelong Learning, Education and Training was mainly defined by two important changes:

- The implementation of the new policy tool, namely the Joint Assessment Framework (JAF) for closer coordination and fine tuning, as well as the consistent and effective monitoring and comparative assessment of quantitative data and relevant developments in the Member States' education and training systems (European Commission, 2010a; Papadakis, 2017, pp. 669- 670)
- 2 out of the 5 previously adopted EU Strategy benchmarks (which define the real political priorities for the existing decade) were substituted, while the remaining 3 were reformed either concerning their content or their quantitative dimension (Papadakis, 2011, p. 933). More specifically, the new indicators pertain to a) Tertiary education attainment target - aimed at increasing the percentage of the population aged 30-34 to 40% by 2020 - substituting the respective Secondary Education indicator and b) Early childhood education and care participation benchmark – aimed at increasing the share of the population aged 4-the respective age of compulsory education start to 95% by 2020 - substituting the sciences graduate indicator (European Commission, 2009, p. 14). The latter benchmark comprises a clear indication of a turning-point to the social dimension of the EU education policy / strategy.

The additional target- benchmark of the "employment rate of recent graduates" and the share of early childhood education participation were integrated in JAF during 2015 (European Commission, 2017, p. 6).

In addition, within the benchmark – target framework of EU2020:

- the benchmark for the incidence of early school leaving has been extended to also include training, while the relevant benchmark set in this context emphasizes that the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10% by 2020 (European Commission, 2009, pp. 76-78);
- the low achievers benchmark has been extended from reading skills to additional major abilities and key competences, namely mathematics and science competences and the relevant intended target is defined as decreasing the share of low achievers ("functionally illiterate")15-years olds to less than 15% (as measured by the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment - PISA) by 2020 (European Commission, 2009, p. 84-88; European Commission, 2011a, p. 17);
- the benchmark for adult participation in lifelong learning increased to an average of 15% from the respective 12,5%, set in the context of the Lisbon Strategy 2000-2010 (European Commission, 2009, pp. 35-37).

We should mention that for the first time, two of the basic benchmarks- priorities regarding education and training were included in the core European strategy- i.e. EU 2020- as headline targets (Papadakis, 2016, p. 93) and more specifically the indicators concerning early education and training leaving and tertiary education (European Commission, 2010, p. 5; European Commission, 2011, p. 7). It is clear that the new policy priorities necessitated the formulation of a new set of policy tools as well as benchmarks, which were considered to contribute decisively to the achievement of major EU education and training objectives in addition to the strengthening of the close connection of both with employability. The tremendous increase of youth unemployment during the onset of the financial crisis (reaching its historical high in April 2013-23.8%), can adequately explain why some of the most important EU2020 education and training policy tools pertain to the link between these two distinctive yet interrelated fields and employment (Eurostat, 2016a, as cited in Papadakis, 2022, p. 215). Within this context, the employability benchmark and more precisely the correlation between education, training, lifelong learning and employment is a multi-parametric indicator which includes 6 sub-indicators / thematic areas (inter alia older workers and low skilled people participation in lifelong learning). The deterioration of the situation concerning the youth unemployment rate and the adoption of the NEET rate (Papadakis et al, 2017) as a category of extremely vulnerable populations adequately justify the aforementioned new priorities (European Commission, 2010b, pp. 16-17; European Commission, 2011b, p. 1-2) as well as the launching of important initiatives in the form of mega projects, such as the 'Youth Guarantee'.

The emblematic importance of the EU2020 Strategy framework for education and training becomes profound as it has been pursuing, right from its very beginning, the objectives of the reduction of youth unemployment and the development of related skills and qualifications through VET and LLL (European Commission, 2012, pp. 2-3; Papadakis, 2022).

4. Results and Concluding Remarks

At the end of the EU2020 and the consequent Work Programme ET2020, it became clear that this strategy has achieved important results and especially under extremely difficult circumstances. However, there are also discouraging data regarding some of the benchmarks and subsequently the key policy priorities in education and training by 2020. More specifically, despite the progress recorded in many member states as far as the rates-benchmarks are concerned, their respective performance pertaining to some indicators continues to show very little or stagnant progress, while significant divergence is still observed between Member States (see in detail Papadakis, 2022). It becomes explicit that by 2020 certain benchmarks in the fields of education and training have been reached. The related targets regard tertiary education attainment (40,5% in 2020),

reduction of the early leavers from education and training (9,9% in 2020) early childhood education and care participation (92,8% in 2020) and the employment rate of recent graduates (80,9% in 2020) (European Commission, 2021, pp. 4, 110). However, it should be noted that this 'success' is mainly attributed to the performance of certain Member States. Thus, disparities between Member States remain apparent and considerable (Papadakis, 2022). Yet, the progress in the remaining major indicators- benchmarks (European Commission, 2021a, p. 4)., namely the low achievement rate in basic competences (22,5% in reading, 22,9% in maths and 22, 3% in science, in 2020) and the adult participation rate in lifelong learning (9,2% in 2020), do not allow for further optimism taking also the current situation into account

Taking all the above into account, in combination with the existing low employment rates of low-skilled persons and their insufficient participation in lifelong learning (as well as older adult groups, especially people aged 55-64), it could be inferred that an important share of the population and more specifically low-skilled persons will face lingering unemployment problems and consequently potential social displacement- exclusion, as well as an increased risk of approaching or living below the poverty line (Papadakis, 2022). According to the European Commission, there is a strong association between educational attainment and social outcomes. Major inequalities "do not only raise concerns in terms of fairness, as they usually reflect a high risk of poverty and social exclusion, but also in economic terms, as they lead to an under- utilization of human capital. Inter-generational transmission of poverty compounds these negative impacts" (European Commission, 2017, p. 22).

The EU 2030 Strategy and the new political priorities for the Education Policy have set mew (more ambitious) EU-level targets, as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021 – 2030).

These new targets are the following, showing the key political priorities for education and training, for the current decade (see European Commission 2021b, pp. 1-2):

- ✓ Early childhood education and care (ECEC): 96% (currently 92,8%)
- ✓ Early leavers from education and training (ELET): less than 95% (currently 9,9%)
- ✓ Tertiary level attainment: 45% (currently 40,5%)
- ✓ Low-achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills: less than 15% (currently 22.5% in reading, 22.9% in mathematics, and 22.3% in science).

In any case, we cannot ignore the already developed strategies, large-scale reforms and new policy tools in the EU, such as JAF, which on the one hand capture the influence of evidence-based policy making (and surely contribute to the de-escalation of the maximalist political features observed in the Lisbon Strategy), while on the other hand appear to constitute 'enabling structures' of an alternative approach regarding education and training in the EU. This alternative approach though cannot be materialized unconditionally. Its statutory requirement consists in a substantial reconfiguration of the interrelation between the social and economic rationale, in favor of the former and translated into concrete public policies (Papadakis & Drakaki, 2016, p. 69).

This reconfiguration is absolutely necessary to effectively confront inequalities both at interstate and state level, which continue to undermine social cohesion (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009) and ultimately the very integration process in the EU (Papadakis, 2022). In other words, the abovementioned challenges require substantial reforms in the public policy complex and a new "balance" between the macroeconomic agenda and the Welfare policies, aiming at the empowerment of the redistributive role of education and the enhancement of the Welfare State (Papadakis and Drakaki 2016, p. 182; Papadakis, 2022). Let's not undermine the fact that Education can increase public trust and subsequently persuade the citizens of our frightened region that the future lasts long (in Louis Althusser's terms).

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