

# *Greek Primary Education in the Context of the European Life Long Learning Area: the transformations and the new (?) roles*

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**Abstract** – *The present paper argues that the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy provided the EU with the tools – mainly the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) – to finally construct a functional European Lifelong Learning (LLL) area spanning all levels and types of education and learning, “from the cradle to the grave”. Accordingly, it puts forward the respective legislative initiatives introduced by the Greek government concerning Primary Education (PE) commenting on both its new roles in the context of the European LLL area and its place in the Greek LLL strategy.*

**Abstract** – *Il presente articolo sostiene che l'adozione della strategia di Lisbona debba fornire all'Unione Europea gli strumenti – principalmente l'Open Method of Coordination (OMC) – per realizzare un funzionale sistema europeo di apprendimento permanente (LLL) che abbracci tutti i livelli e le tipologie formative, “dalla culla alla tomba”. Conseguentemente, si affrontano le relative iniziative legislative introdotte dal governo greco in materia di istruzione primaria (PE), commentandone il nuovo ruolo nel contesto sia europeo, sia greco, di LLL.*

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## **1. Introduction**

At Lisbon, in March 2000, the Heads of the EU Member States made decisions that have significantly affected European education and training systems ever since. Within a context characterized by upheaval resulting from globalization and the challenges of the new increasingly knowledge-based economy they adopted an optimistic, forward looking political discourse (Pepin, 2006, pp. 206-207) setting the ambitious task of drawing up a new economic, social and environmental strategy with the aim for the EU: “*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs*”

*and greater social cohesion”* (Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, point 5).

The Lisbon strategy represents a broad coherent strategy with an overall medium-term objective and a structured, newly introduced, method for action and follow-up (Pepin, 2006, pp. 206-207) – the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC seeks to underpin the process of reform and change, with its success being largely dependent on the determination shown by the Member States in putting it into practice at national level<sup>1</sup> (Pepin, 2006, Veiga & Amaral, 2006).

At Lisbon, in March 2000, education saw the development of Community coordinated strategies for greater convergence of national policies (through the Education and Training 2010 programme) along with employment (through the European Employment Strategy, ESA) and the economy (through the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, BPEGs). Accordingly, European education and training systems gained a new pivotal role in what concerns the renewed prosperity of the EU. What is more, the desire<sup>2</sup> concerning the formulation of the European Life Long Learning (LLL) area in

<sup>1</sup> The OMC provides a new framework for cooperation between the Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives. Under this intergovernmental method, the Member States are evaluated by one another (peer pressure), with the Commission's role being limited to surveillance. The European Parliament and the Court of Justice play virtually no part in the OMC process ([http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/open\\_method\\_coordination\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/open_method_coordination_en.htm), 26-04-2010).

<sup>2</sup> The idea regarding the formulation of a European LLL area was not born in 2000. By highlighting the development of lifelong learning the EU took up once again the ideas put forward 20 years earlier by Altiero Spinelli, Commissioner responsible for education issues in the early stages of the institution's involvement. The concepts of LLL and the Learning Society became increasingly important in the period from 1993 to 2000. Particularly, in December 1993 the publication of the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment supported lifelong learning. In 1995, the White Paper 'Teaching and learning – towards the learning society' envisaged the EU's reaction to the emergence of the Learning Society. To the same end, the year 1996 became the European Year of Lifelong Learning and the December Education Council of the same year outlined a strategy for lifelong learning. Next year, in October 1997 the preamble to the Amsterdam Treaty underlined the need to 'promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge' for the European peoples 'through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating'. In November 1997 the Communication from the Commission 'Towards a Europe of knowledge' incorporated the guidelines for future action in the areas of education, training and youth. The Luxembourg Special European Council on employment, again in November, laid down the first guidelines for national employment policies and rendered Lifelong learning a crosscutting objective of the European employment strategy. In 1999, the new financial framework for the EU for the period 2000–06 'Agenda 2000', put 'knowledge at the forefront' and placed greater emphasis on internal policies – heading 3 of the budget, including education, training and youth. Finally, in March 2000 in Lisbon the investment in knowledge was placed at the heart of the Union's new economic and social strategy (Pepin, 2006).

conjunction with the OMC provided the Council with both the context and the tools<sup>3</sup> to design policies involving all institutions of both (vocational) education and training in the Member States at all levels – including compulsory education<sup>4</sup> – let alone all types of learning activities – formal, non formal and informal.

At the same period of time, since 2000, education practitioners – mainly teachers and mid-level executives – at the Primary Education (PE) level<sup>5</sup> witnessed a number of developments concerning its structure, content of studies, their working status and initial and/or in-service training. In short, new types of Primary Schools have been introduced besides the conventional one; new lessons have been added to the curriculum accompanied by innovative teaching methods with the use, mainly of ICT, while teachers and school principals do function in a completely differentiated context, in comparison to the period before 2000 facing a new whole set of different challenges.

In this context, this paper investigates the relationship between the European policies, since 2000, regarding LLL and the respective Greek policies at the PE level. Accordingly, after reviewing the recent developments at the European level, concerning, particularly, the formulation of the European LLL space focuses on the legislative initiatives from the part of the Greek government regarding PE.

## 2. The formulation of the European LLL space

The Feira European Council in June 2000, within the context of the Lisbon Strategy, asked the Member States, the Council and the Commission, within their areas of competence, to “*identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all*” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 3).

Some months later, as a result of the public consultation that followed, the Commission published its Communication entitled “*Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*” underlining the determination on the part of the EU to converge European policies to that area<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> To put it in a simplistic manner, the commonly agreed, at the European level, strategies regarding LLL – that is also education at the Primary level – have been transformed – through the OMC – into national goals being implemented in a very tight monitoring context.

<sup>4</sup> Compulsory education was previously considered to belong exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Member States being directly related to the preservation of national identities.

<sup>5</sup> The main part of compulsory education in Greece lasting for six years.

<sup>6</sup> It was actually the end of a process, which started in December 1993 when the Commission published the “White Paper on Growth, competitiveness and employment supported lifelong learning”.

The EU, in line with the strategy adopted in Lisbon<sup>7</sup> in 2000, envisaged, through the economical use of existing resources, policies and, of course, the OMC<sup>8</sup>, to establish an area, with global appeal, characterized by the free movement among different learning settings<sup>9</sup>, jobs, regions and countries fostering all social inclusion, active citizenship, personal fulfillment and, mainly, employability – along with all various other, related with the economy and the market, benefits of LLL – (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 3).

In fact, Member States, towards this end, agreed to develop and implement coherent and comprehensive policies incorporating all types of education and learning – formal, informal and non-formal<sup>10</sup> – at all levels – “*from the cradle to the grave*” (Delors, 1996). They, thus, expanded their interest in the level of compulsory education and allowed for the design, the implementation and monitoring of policies in this area to be made in European loci rather than the (sub-) national level, as was the case up until then<sup>11</sup>.

In a few words, ever since 2000, within the OMC, the European Council – that is a European inter-governmental institution – decides on either policies and/or policy priorities incorporating schools at the level of compulsory education and the Commission – a supra-national institution – monitors and reports on the level of implementation of these policies from the part of the Member States<sup>12</sup> while the other European Institutions – the European Par-

<sup>7</sup> The European Council of March 2005 reaffirmed the stance it had adopted on previous occasions, stating that ‘lifelong learning is a sine qua non if the Lisbon objectives are to be achieved’.

<sup>8</sup> Mainly the Education & Training 2010 Programme.

<sup>9</sup> As in contrast to educational ones.

<sup>10</sup> References to LLL should be understood in the light of the extended definition adopted by the Commission in 2001: “*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p.9). In 2004, CEDEFOP produced an alternative, definition for LLL, rather, emphasizing its results: “*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons*” while it also uses the term life-wide learning in the same context with the emphasis being laid on the learning settings: “*learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage*” (CEDEFOP, 2009, pp. 123-124).

<sup>11</sup> It is the first time in the history of the European Policies in the field of education that a European Institution – even an intergovernmental one – may take decisions affecting education institutions at the level of compulsory education. In regard with the history of European policies in the field of education see also Asderaki, 2009, Pepin, 2006, Stamelos & Vassilopoulos 2004.

<sup>12</sup> In what concerns the present paper, the policy priorities regarding Primary Education Institutions in Greece should be looked up in the European policy documents of the past decade or so.

liament, the European Court of Justice etc. – also retain their own special role in this process.

What is more, and especially in what concerns PE in particular, the EU focus has expanded in seven policy areas.

### *1. Basic Competences*<sup>13</sup>

They seem to be the hottest issue in the EU at the moment – one of the top EU policy priorities in the field of VET. The LLL programme (2007-2013) allocated, for the first time, a number of funds for the development of policies in this field. In the same vein, many of the EU's institutions developed policies towards the same end. The truth is that the discussions about both the basic competences incorporation in the national curricula and the ways of their acquisition's official accreditation started in the context of the Lisbon strategy immediately after the Education & Training Programme 2010 launch. The ultimate goal was for the citizens of the EU to be able to respond effectively to the constant shifts in the needs of the market in the context of the Learning Society. Almost a year later, both the Commission and the Council incorporated basic competences among the top priorities of EU policy (Pepin, 2006). At the same time, the Commission had already set

<sup>13</sup> The 8 basic competences are: Communication in the mother tongue, in the foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in sciences and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal – intercultural and social competences and civic competence, entrepreneurship and cultural expression. With regard to this policy priority see also: Commission of the European Communities 2002, Action Plan on Skills and Mobility, COM (2002) 72 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2005, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, COM (2005) 548 Final; Council of the EU (2005), Conclusions on the role of the development of skills and competences in taking forward the Lisbon goals (2005/C 292/02); Commission of the European Communities 2006, Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Fostering Entrepreneurial Mindsets through Education and Learning, COM (2006) 33 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2008, Improving Competences for 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools, COM (2008) 425 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2008, New Skills for New Jobs: Anticipating and Matching Labour Market and Skill Needs, COM (2008) 868 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2009, Key Competences for a Changing World, COM (2009) 640 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2009, Key competences for a changing world, SEC (2009) 1598; Commission of the European Communities 2010, An Agenda for new skills and jobs - A European contribution towards full employment, COM (2010) 862 Final; Council of the EU (2010), Presidency Conclusions on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative (2010/C 135/03); Council of the EU, (2010), Conclusions on , Increasing the level of basic skills in the context of European cooperation on schools for the 21st century, OJ C 323, 30.11.2010, p. 11-14; EURRYDICE (2012), Developing key competences at school in Europe; EURYDICE (2012), Entrepreneurship at school in Europe; Commission of the European Communities 2012, Assessment of key competences in initial education and training – Policy guidance, SWD (2012) 371.

up a working group with the aim to formulate a framework of competences necessary for the Learning Society accompanied by explicit recommendations on the ways that they would be acquired by all citizens in Europe. Accordingly, a number of provisions relevant to the acquisition of basic competences were incorporated to the four of the five benchmarks set for the monitoring of the progress of the implementation of the Lisbon strategy: literacy, early school leaving, completion of upper secondary education and participation in LLL. In 2005, the European Youth Pact addressed the need for the development of a common set of basic competences. To the same end, the Commission assigned the development of a common set of basic competences to one of the eight peer learning clusters that assembled, taking full advantage of the OMC potential, with the aim to aid Member States adjust their policies accordingly in the context of European cooperation. Additionally, in 2005, the Commission incorporated the acquisition of basic competences into the integrated Policy Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008), (Commission of the European Communities, (2005) 141). In the same policy document, the Commission called for the adaptation of the VET systems in the EU towards the direction of facilitating the acquisition of basic competences. In the end, the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 defined the key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006]: communication in the mother tongue, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts; communication in foreign languages, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen; digital competence involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT); learning to learn is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities; social and civic competences. Social competence refers to personal, in-

terpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance; cultural awareness and expression, which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. ICT<sup>15</sup>

The importance of ICT in the formulation of the European Information Society was reaffirmed in both the Spring European Councils of Stockholm (2001) and Barcelona (2002). ICT was acknowledged as one of the top priorities towards the direction of achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. In this context eEUROPE initiative along with the eLearning action plan received funding exceeding 44.000.000 €.

<sup>14</sup> [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/education\\_training\\_youth/lifelong\\_learning/c11090\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm) (20/02/2013).

<sup>15</sup> In relation to the particular policy priority, see also: Commission of the European Communities, 2001, The eLearning Action Plan – Designing Tomorrow’s Education, COM (2001) 172 Final; Commission of the European Communities, 2002, eEurope 2005 – An Information Society for All, COM (2002), 263 Final; Commission of the European Communities, 2002, Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council adopting a multi-annual programme (2004-2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme), COM (2002) 751 Final; Commission of the European Communities, 2006, Final Evaluation Report on eLearning (2004-2006); Decision No 2318/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 December 2003 adopting a multiannual programme (2004 to 2006) for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme), OJ L 345, 31.12.2003, p. 9-16.

### 3. *Languages*<sup>16</sup>

The Barcelona European Council in March 2002 emphasized the role of early language teaching aiming at the command of at least two foreign languages in addition to the mother tongue. In 2003 the Commission adopted an action plan where it stipulated its determination to put forward various different sets of actions aiming at encouraging national, regional and local authorities towards the direction of facilitating language learning and multilingualism. EU's long term aim is to increase language learning to the point where every EU citizen can adequately communicate in at least two foreign languages other than his/her own.

### 4. *Mobility*<sup>17</sup>

Mobility and exchange programmes (SOCRATES, LEONARDO, Life Long Learning Programme), at all educational levels, have been actively deployed in the last decade to create a greater sense of belonging to Europe, as well as to supporting the structural reforms needed to establish the high quality systems of education and training to which the European Union has pinned its ambition. However, mobility has never been dealt as an end in itself. It is thought to serve the idea to act as a trigger for the active engagement of students and teachers throughout Europe. The Comenius action for school education, especially, has been strengthened, incorporating most of the Lingua actions and placing more emphasis than in the past on continuing training for teachers. Particular emphasis has also been given to the cooperation between schools through subjects dealt with by transnational partnerships between schools, through its specific action supporting the education of children of migrant workers and gypsies, and through intercultural

<sup>16</sup> Both ICT and Language Learning comprise two of the eight basic competences. They do, however, also comprise discernible policy areas where the EU has really focused. In what concerns especially languages see also: Commission of the European Communities 2003, Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006, COM (2003) 449 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2005, The European Indicator of Language Competence, COM (2005) 356 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2005, A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism, COM (2005) 596 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2007, Framework for the European survey on language competences, COM (2007) 184 Final; Council of the EU (2011) Presidency Conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility, (2007/C 372/07); Commission of the European Communities 2012, Language competences for employability, mobility and growth, SWD (2012) 372.

<sup>17</sup> With regard to this policy area see also: Commission of the European Communities, 2004, Report on the follow-up to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community of students, persons undergoing training, volunteers and teachers and trainers, COM (2004) 21 Final; Commission of the European Communities, 2006, The impact of COMENIUS school partnerships on participating school



education – many projects selected under this action were directly related to the fight against racism and xenophobia in education.

### 5. Education Practitioners<sup>18</sup>

All the issues relative to the education practitioners (teachers and trainers-educators) quality of education were connected, in the context of the Lisbon strategy, to the achievement of various other EU policy priorities: combating early school leaving, increasing the level of participation in upper secondary education, literacy, etc. The quality of teaching, directly affecting school achievement, was considered to be an important indicator of the EU potential to render itself competitive in a globalized context. In this vein, the first policies regarding the improvement of the education practitioners (teachers and trainers-educators) education were part of the LEONARDO and SOCRATES programmes for the period 2000 to 2006. The eLearning initiative, to the same end, in the period between 2004 and 2006 funded actions relative to education practitioners training in, mainly, ICT. The LLL programme, for the period from 2007 to 2013 incorporated actions referring to the quality of teachers' education and its European dimension, school management, the education practitioners' mobility etc. More recently, the European Council in its conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') reaffirmed the emphasis laid on education practitioners stipulating that "there is a need to ensure high quality teaching, to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers and trainers, and to make teaching an attractive career-choice" (strategic objective 2). Particularly, as mentioned above, the policies in relation to the education and training of education practitioners is connected to other important European Education Policy issues: Social policy emphasizing the role of

<sup>18</sup>In relation to this policy priority, see also: Commission of the European Communities 2005, Modernizing Education and Training: A vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe, COM (2005) 549 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2006, Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems, COM (2006) 481 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2007, Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, COM (2007) 392 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2008, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, COM (2008) 179 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2010, A New Impetus for European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to Support Europe 2020 Strategy, COM (2010) 296 Final; Commission of the European Communities 2007, Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, SEC (2012) 1009; Commission of the European Communities 2012, Supporting the Teaching Profession for Better Learning Outcomes, SWD (2012) 374; Council of the EU (2007), Presidency Conclusions on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, (2007/C 300/07); Council of the EU (2008), Presidency Conclusions on Preparing Young People for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools, (2008/C 319/08).

education and training in enhancing social inclusion and combating poverty, innovation policies laying emphasis on the fact that teachers help youngsters acquire entrepreneurial and innovative mentality, research policy focusing on the improvement of teaching sciences in all educational levels, entrepreneurial policy for the promotion of entrepreneurship and multilingualism.

#### 6. *Early School Leaving*<sup>19</sup>

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council agreed to focus its efforts in decreasing the average percentage (19,3%) of young people who leave school early. To this end it defined one benchmark stipulating that “*by 2010 EU average rate of early school leavers to no be more than 10% (the rate in 2004 was 16%)*”. It is believed that young people’s ability to develop their potential, work and participate actively in society is closely related to the EU’s economic and social prosperity.

#### 7. *Quality of Education*<sup>20</sup>

Quality in education has been in the scope of European education policies ever since 1993. Particularly, article 165 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty of European Union – ex article 149/126 of the Treaty of European Communities – provided that: “*The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity*”. In addition, after the Lisbon’s European Council, in March 2000, Heads of EU member states have given added impetus to education policies, and particularly those in relation to quality. Accordingly, EU brought about the formulation of various policy initiatives at both the European – e.g. Education & Training 2010 Work Programme, Action Plan eEurope 2005, Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), Comenius for school education programme etc. – and national levels, in relation to quality in education, within the context of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Member states agreed to introduce policies, in accordance with their economic, social and cultural context, aiming at the improvement of

<sup>19</sup> In relation to tackling Early School Leaving see also: Commission of the European Communities 2007, Promoting Young People’s Full Participation in Education, Employment and Society, COM (2007) 498 Final; Commission of the European Communities, 2011, Tackling Early School Leaving, COM (2011) 18 Final; European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2011, Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU.

<sup>20</sup> With regard to this policy area see also: Commission of the European Communities 2000, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Cooperation in the Quality Evaluation in School Education, COM (2000) 523 final; Eurydice (2006), Quality Assurance in Teacher Education in Europe, Brussels: European Union.

the quality standards in their education systems emphasizing the role of evaluation and mobilizing all relevant institutions and/or individuals to this end. Greek governments, in this particular context, introduced a set of policy initiatives in numerous directions in line with the specific areas of reform regarding quality in education suggested, mainly, by the European Commission with the aim to ensure high quality standards at every level of the education system: Wide access in the education systems, Teacher's initial education and training/professional development, Introduction of a system of evaluation/self evaluation, Investment on ICTs, Curricula reforms, Autonomous schools, Promotion of innovation and creativity, Managerial skills, Effective use of resources.

In light of this information it is rather interesting to now focus on the Greek legislative initiatives referring to PE.

### 3. The Greek PE in the context of the LLL area

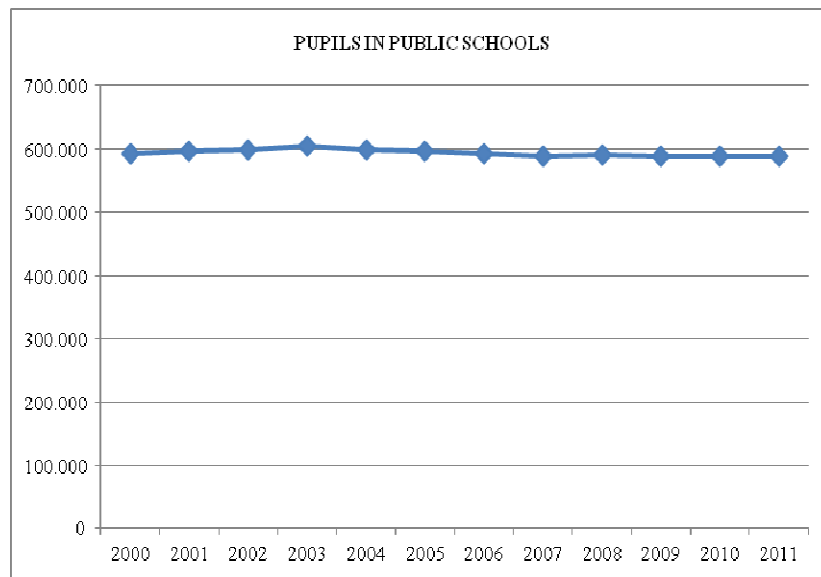
Greek PE comprised 4,420 Public School Units in the school year 2011/12, 59,782 public school teachers of various specialties and 590,378 public school pupils (Table 1). This is a first basic outline of the Greek PE in terms of numbers allowing for some preliminary observations to be made in relation to the transformation that took place in the last decade in the light of the country's participation in the formulation of the European LLL area.

The Greek PE in numbers (2000-2011)												
	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
No. of Public School Units	5,708	5,600	5,541	5,471	5,398	5,297	5,220	5,174	5,127	5,075	4,991	4,420
No. of Private School Units	386	389	384	383	380	378	374	372	369	365	365	355
Teaching Staff <sup>21</sup> (Public Schools)	48,872	50,986	52,775	57,305	59,387	60,814	63,513	64,058	64,977	66,409	61,765	59,782
Teaching Staff (Private Schools)	3,218	3,334	3,360	3,465	3,495	3,602	3,829	3,985	4,041	4,066	4,020	3,801
No. of Pupils (Public Schools)	593,094	597,847	600,254	605,961	599,843	596,652	593,583	590,491	590,640	589,578	590,223	590,378
No. of Pupils (Private Schools)	46,838	48,484	48,233	48,819	47,700	46,548	46,378	46,818	46,836	46,357	43845	43212
Source: ELSTAT 2013												

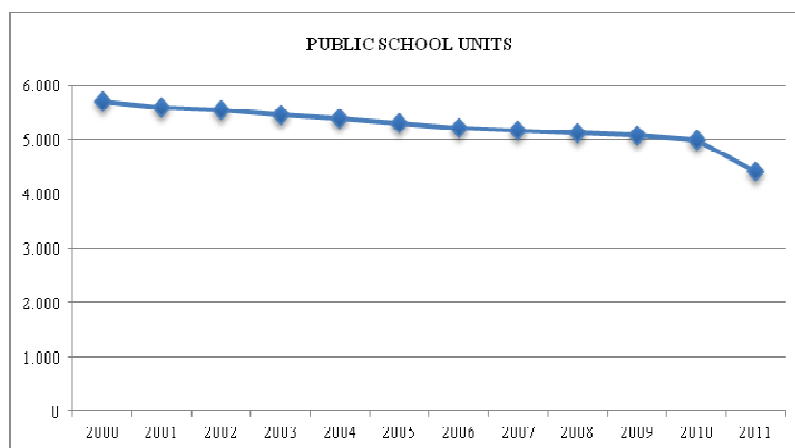
Table 1

<sup>21</sup> Including teachers, other teaching staff (foreign language teachers, teachers of music etc).

First of all, the number of Public School Units has decreased considerably over the last decade (from 5,541 in 2002/03 to 4,991 in 2010/11) while the number of pupils did not follow the same trend (there were 600,254 pupils in Public Schools in 2002/03 and 590.223 in 2010/11). The particular development may definitely be attributed to the major merger – unification project of public school units in all levels of compulsory education – from early childhood to primary and secondary education- with the aim to cut down on running costs for schools. Actually, during the year 2010, when it became effective, the project applied to neighbouring school units characterized by low pupil population. It additionally considered the assessed needs for each region, the landform, infrastructures and, of course, the operational expenses of all schools. The project resulted in abolishing, to a great extent, double-shift schools. It also integrated pupils in bigger school units facilitating, among other things, the effective use of all available resources (infrastructure and human resources). Finally, it put on offer a greater variety of options for students (ICT, foreign languages, etc) moved towards promoting the quality of education provided (graphs 1 & 2).



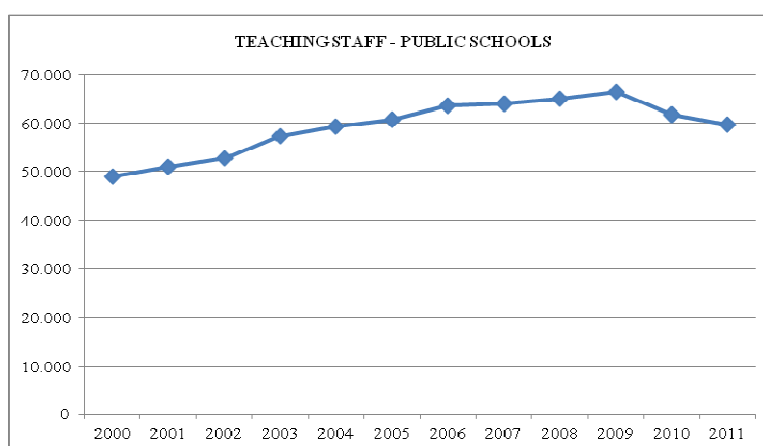
Graph 1: No of Public School Units (2000-2011) – ESYE



Graph 2: No of Pupils in Public Schools (2000-2011) – ESYE

The fluctuation in the number of Teaching Staff – mainly in Public Schools – in the last decade is another issue that should be emphasized on the basis of what is referenced in table one.

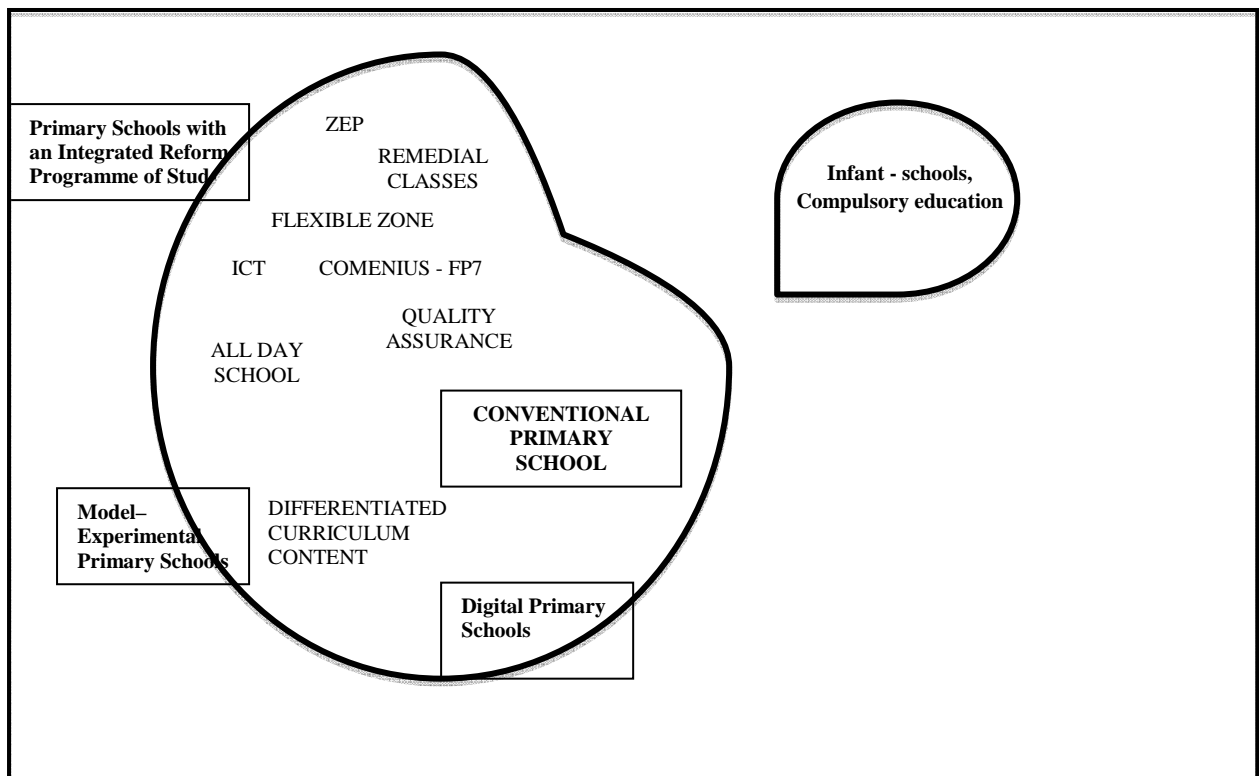
The number of Primary School Teachers increased at a very low rate from the year 2000 onwards. Particularly, there were 43,010 Primary School Teachers in 2002/03 and 46,526 in 2010/11. At the same time, the respective number of Teachers of Art, Music, Foreign Languages, Physical Education and ICT increased significantly from the year 2002/2003 (6,080) to the year 2010/2011 (13,493) betraying the emphatic increase in the number of new subjects to the Primary School’s everyday schedule (graph 3).



Graph 3: No of Teaching Staff in Public Schools (2000-2011)

Greek PE did not only change in terms of numbers in the last decade though. Within the last ten years, many transformations have been noted at the Primary Education level in Greece. These transformations differ on their level of implementation due to various reasons – mainly, magnitude, economic effect and acceptance at the local level.

However, they all center on three main areas: a. the ways in which PE has been structured and organized, b. the content of studies, and c. education practitioners (see graph 4).



Graph 4: The contemporary picture of the Greek PE

Particularly, the contemporary picture of PE in terms of its structure and organization is definitely different in relation to ten years ago. It may also strike as impressive if its complexity along with the variety of the different pathways on offer are taken into consideration. It is not only the conventional Primary School that has been changed in relation to ten years ago in

terms of its organization but also the fact that three new types of Primary schools have been introduced.

First of all, infant-schools – Nipiagogeia in Greek – are now considered part of compulsory education, in an effort to tackle early school leaving and promote the development of key competences the relevant skills and knowledge for all, from the very early stages of the individual learning process. Particularly, from the school year 2007/08 pre-school education has been made compulsory (Law 3518/06) increasing the number of compulsory education years from nine (9) to ten (10). To the same end, all-day Infant and Primary Schools, with extended time-schedules, have been introduced<sup>22</sup>.

Secondly, provisions so as to tackle low school attainment – and consequently early school leaving – have also been made for children with disabilities<sup>23</sup>, ethnic minorities and poor social backgrounds. Zones of Educational Priorities (ZEP), introduced by Law 3879/2010 were targeted plans per geographical region, which dealt with school failure and consequently early school leaving, promoting social inclusion. Particularly, the Ministry of Education introduced the ZEP “referring to geographical regions where the presence of ethnic minorities was intense and/or considered, mainly, blue collar. ZEP were introduced in regions where the operation of school units of primary and secondary education was characterized by low total educational indicator, high rate in early school leaving, low rate in tertiary education, as well as low social/economic indicators. The objective of ZEP is the equal integration of all pupils into the school system through the operation of support actions about the strengthening of educational outcomes, such as mainly the operation of reception classes, classes of remedial teaching, summer school classes and classes where pupils' mother tongue is taught. The more general framework under which the Zones of Educational Priorities fall is: “*Fighting against school drop-out via the reinforcement of pre-school education and primary education, of the all-day pre-primary and of the all-day primary school, as well as via the reinforcement of remedial teaching at ISCED 2*”. Within the various ZEP in the country, Primary Schools or classes within them provide for pupils with disadvantages by the use of differentiated educational methods, ICT, extended time-schedule, tailor-made instruction and close contact with the family and the surrounding community<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the introduction of all-day Elementary and Primary Schools see also: Law 3518/2006; F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: The Time-schedule of all-day Primary Schools (in Greek); F.50/76/121153/C1/13-11-2002 MA: Time-schedule, Programme of all-day Primary Schools – Content of Studies for the subjects of English, Theatrical Education, Dances, Music, Art, Physical Education (in Greek).

<sup>23</sup> In this field see also: Law. 3699/2008: Special Education and education of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs (in Greek)

<sup>24</sup> The legislative initiatives concerning ZEPs are the following: AF.821/3412R/157-46/Z1/31-12-2010: Regulation of Zones of Educational Priority, admissions and tutoring

In the same context, Law 3699/2008 about special needs education stipulates school provision for pupils with special needs as an integrated part of the compulsory and free of charge public education. Pupils with disabilities, special needs or/and learning difficulties are encouraged and facilitated with their schooling activities, when attendance within schools of the mainstream educational system becomes rather difficult. When the latter is not possible, there is provision that schooling of the above-mentioned pupils is provided in autonomous school units of special education and care. There is also provision for home schooling, when needed, especially when pupils suffer serious health problems for a long or a short-time period, which prevent them from moving and attending classes at school. At the Primary Education level, pupils who require additional teaching assistance when identified by teachers, attend the remedial teaching programme, whereas priority is given to 1st and 2nd grade pupils who have not mastered basic reading, writing and calculation skills yet.

In addition to what was previously mentioned, besides the conventional Primary schools, three new types of Primary schools -with their own unique characteristics each- have been introduced.

The first – Primary Schools with an Integrated Reform Programme of Studies<sup>25</sup> – are counting for the 30% of the student population – that is the 800 largest schools in the country. They went operational in a pilot phase during 2010-2011. Primary Schools with an Integrated Reform Programme of Studies offer more optional subjects such as study/preparation as an integrated subject, sports, drama, English, music second foreign language, arts etc. They also promote a differentiated and intercultural learning incorporating new educational subjects, with the aim to enhance the apprehension of basic skills, lay emphasis on ICT and languages –providing pupils with certification of acquisition of the relative skills- and retain a differentiated time-schedule from the other Primary Schools.

classes (In Greek); F.12/20/2045/C1/10-01-2011: The Time-schedule of Primary Schools within Zones of Educational Priority (in Greek); YATY/809/101455/C1/7-9-2011: Regulation of Zones of Educational Priority, admissions and tutoring classes (in Greek); F.1TY/814/103114/C1/09-09-2011: Call for the introduction of admission and tutoring classes within ZEPs (2011-2012) (in Greek); F 1TY.930/118741/C1/14-10-2011: Incorporation of Primary Schools in ZEPs.

<sup>25</sup> In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also: F.3/609/60754/C1/28-5-2010 MA: Appointment of 800 Primary Schools with UREP (in Greek); F.12/652/63838/C1 3-6-2010 MA: Clarifications about the 800 Primary Schools with UREP (in Greek); F.12/879/88413/C1/20-7-2010 MA: Teaching Methods – Content of Studies of the new educational subjects which will be incorporated in the all-day Primary Schools with UREP. Review and updates of curricula for the educational subjects of the all-day programme (In Greek); F.12/520/61575/C1/30-5-2011 Time-Schedule, Completion and amendments of F. 12/620/61531/C1/31-5-2010 MA, F.12/773/77094/C1/28-7-2006 MA.



Digital Primary Schools – which are found in their pilot phase of implementation – as their name suggest emphasize the use of ICT in the everyday teaching practice promoting digital literacy<sup>26</sup>. Digital Schools will be equipped with high-speed Internet connection as well as with interactive boards, single digital environment, computer networks, digital school textbooks, a portal and a digital library for the on-line dissemination of information and distribution of educational/pedagogical/teaching material to all involved parties (teachers, pupils and parents). The action will also provide all teachers with the necessary training.

Finally, the third type of contemporary Primary schools in Greece, Model-Experimental Primary Schools – which are also found in their pilot phase – address new methods of teaching, the use of various educational approaches, new educational subjects, the ways the school opens up to the surrounding community and the use of new institutions in relation to the school's internal organization, administration, hierarchy and management<sup>27</sup>.

In what concerns the content of studies of the Greek PE, the effort to integrate basic competences in every level and phase of the education system may have been the main factor provoking changes. Besides the traditional subjects -many of which such as Greek language, mathematics, science, civic education, have been retouched<sup>28</sup> – new ones have been added addressing, more or less, contemporary issues related, mainly, with the apprehension, on the part of the pupils, of the basic competences – environmental education, arts, music. New textbooks and learning material, produced during the last 3 years, are in alignment with the major aim of basic competences' development, within the context of the Cross-Curricular Single Studies Program Framework (DEPPS) and the new curricula. The new Cross-Curricular Single Framework for Studies Program (DEPPS) introduced the cross-curricular approach to knowledge and basic competences' development over the whole Primary and Secondary (both lower & upper) education. To the same end, the introduction of the "Flexible Zone" required schools and learning organizations to devote time to cross-curricular work such as learning in teams, projects and events and to involve all pupils in a more active, collective and participatory learning processes. Particular attention has also been paid to ICT<sup>29</sup> and modern languages<sup>30</sup> with the aim being, in relation to

<sup>26</sup> In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also: F. 97911/Γ1/31-8-2011 MA: Appointment of Primary and Secondary Education Schools for the pilot implementation of the new study-programmes (in Greek)

<sup>27</sup> The law regulating Model-Experimental Primary Schools is the following: Law.3966/2011 (in Greek).

<sup>28</sup> The legislative initiatives concerning the updating of the traditional educational subjects are the following: MA 21072<sup>A</sup>/C2/13-3-2003, MA 21072B/C2/13-3-2003.

<sup>29</sup> In relation to the particular legislative initiative see also: F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: The content of the educational subject of "New Technologies" – all-day Primary School (in Greek).

the second, for the students to communicate in at least two foreign languages by the time they finish compulsory education.

Finally, the content of studies in Greek PE is, also, enriched by various projects funded either directly or indirectly by the EU – Comenius, eTwinning, the FP7, the European Social Fund – and implemented by education practitioners in Primary Schools<sup>31</sup>.

Education practitioners could not have remained unaffected by the various changes in and around Primary Schools in the last decade. First of all, the Bologna process has posed various challenges in relation to their University studies. Moreover, their in-service training needs have been multiplied the past decade culminating to their existent workload (Stamelos & Bartzakli, 2011). In addition, new roles have been added to their traditional ones also requiring attention and effort – Headmaster (responsible of the school’s management), Pedagogical Advisor (advisor on educational issues and responsible for the evaluation of teachers), project manager (eTwinning, Comenius, projects funded by the FP7 etc.), teacher, contact person etc. Accordingly, the various attempts on the part of the government to implement a system of quality assurance in PE has provoked severe turbulences affecting education practitioners and the ways in which they respond to their duties depending on their position to the hierarchy and their responsibilities (Stamelos *et al.*, 2012; 2010). Finally, a new profession, relative to education, seems to flourish in the last decade in Greece – probably all around Europe as well. The profession of educators in all formal, informal and non formal educational services which have been developing all around the country aiding students acquire certifications of skills acquisition in various, differentiated fields – i.e. hair-dressers, bakers, car-mechanics etc. – stands besides that of teachers both expanding the boundaries of the teaching profession in Greece along with the content of their pretensions towards the government and limiting its potential to satisfy them in their whole (Stamelos & Vassilopoulos 2010; 2004).

In short, PE in Greece has undergone changes – differentiated in what concerns their level of implementation – regarding the content of studies, its structure – organization and, definitely, its personnel. The focus of the changes seems to lie within the policy areas where the EU focus has expanded to the level of PE (basic competences, ICT, languages, mobility, education practitioners, early school leaving and quality of education). In this

<sup>30</sup> In what concerns the particular legislative initiative see also: F.20/482/95210/C1/9-9-2003 MA: Teaching of the English Language from the third grade (in Greek); F.12-/773/77094/28-7-2006: Teaching a second foreign language from the fourth grade in all-day Primary School (in Greek).

<sup>31</sup> The design and implementation of various educational projects as well as mobility projects – i.e. Comenius – in Greek PE is regulated by the following Circulars: 151158/C7/30-11-2012, 121118/C7/8-10-2012, 121118/C7/8-10-2012.

context it is high time to turn to the new roles attributed to the Greek PE in the context of the European LLL area and discuss on the challenges posed on both and its pupils.

#### **4. New (?) roles for the Greek PE**

Community cooperation in the field of education has changed considerably in the last fifty years. It now involves all education institutions addressing all ages and kinds of population promoting lifelong learning opportunities blinking the eye towards employability, mainly, and the economy.

In this sense, Primary Schools in Greece do adopt new roles away from their previous ones regarding, centrally, the socialization of the new generations of Greeks.

The emphasis on the apprehension of basic skills, especially to the point where they are linked closely to learning outcomes may significantly affect the content of studies in Primary Schools. Besides the relevant transformations in the content of studies involved with their acquisition, the ways which will be introduced for their certification along with the willingness to be related with the signage of the end of learning cycles –instead of the academic year- may also pose significant challenges to the very organization of studies in Primary Schools. Additionally, the potential that teachers have to implement various projects to their schools enriching their programme of studies while other schools follow the national curriculum may result in great variations in an education system where parents do not have the right – at least officially – to choose among different Primary Schools. To the same end, significant questions raised from that fact that at this point besides the conventional Primary School, three new types of Primary Schools have evolved. Nobody can seriously argue about neither the landscape in PE in Greece nor the role of teachers in it.

In short, the aforementioned transformations concerning the shift towards lifelong learning meeting with the needs of the market and employability hide a serious danger. Societies may comprise anti-social subjects seeking to serve only their own rights and best interests. Nobody can provide the necessary assurance that the majority of people in modern societies retain the willingness and/or the democratic culture to position themselves in the service of the interests of the society (Karalis & Balias, 2007, p.17). Somewhere there lies the new role of Primary Education Institutions in the new context.

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