

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE LATE 80'S AND EARLY 90'S: COMETT, ERASMUS, PETRA, LINGUA, TEMPUS, AND EUROTECNET

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Abstract: This study delves into the impact of key European educational programs launched between the late 1980s and early 1990s, namely COMETT, Erasmus, PETRA, Lingua, TEMPUS, and Eurotecnet. These initiatives represented a concerted effort to foster deeper cooperation within the European Community, focusing on enhancing educational and vocational training opportunities. The COMETT program was instrumental in connecting academia with the labor market and advancing technology training but did not adequately support vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and the unemployed. ERASMUS and PETRA contributed significantly to student mobility and youth vocational training, though PETRA struggled to directly address rising youth unemployment. LINGUA focused on enhancing foreign language skills, vital for fostering European integration, while TEMPUS facilitated educational reforms in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. EUROTECNET promoted innovation in vocational training by integrating new technologies but faced challenges related to consistency across member states. Despite these initiatives' successes in modernizing the educational systems and enhancing European competitiveness, many programs prioritized economic and technological objectives over social inclusion. Vulnerable groups often remained underrepresented in these reforms. However, these early efforts laid the groundwork for later programs like Leonardo da Vinci and SOCRATES, which aimed to balance competitiveness with social equity. The article calls for further research on the human impact of these programs, particularly regarding youth unemployment and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

Keywords: COMETT, EEC, Erasmus, Eurotecnet, Lingua, PETRA, TEMPUS

Rezumat: Acest studiu analizează impactul programelor educaționale europene cheie lansate între sfârșitul anilor 1980 și începutul anilor 1990, și anume COMETT, Erasmus, PETRA, Lingua, TEMPUS și Eurotecnet. Aceste inițiative au reprezentat un efort concertat de a promova o cooperare mai profundă în cadrul Comunității Europene, concentrându-se pe îmbunătățirea oportunităților de educație și formare

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profesională. Programul COMETT a avut un rol esențial în conectarea mediului academic cu piața muncii și în cooperarea tehnologică, dar nu a sprijinit în mod adecvat grupurile vulnerabile, precum femeile, minoritățile etnice și șomerii. ERASMUS și PETRA au contribuit semnificativ la mobilitatea studenților și la formarea profesională a tinerilor, deși PETRA a întâmpinat dificultăți în soluționarea directă a șomajului în rândul tinerilor. LINGUA s-a concentrat pe îmbunătățirea competențelor lingvistice străine, esențiale pentru integrarea europeană, în timp ce TEMPUS a facilitat reformele educaționale în Europa Centrală și de Est post-comunistă. EUROTENET a promovat inovația în formarea profesională prin integrarea noilor tehnologii, dar a întâmpinat provocări legate de coerența între statele membre. Deși aceste inițiative au avut succes în modernizarea sistemelor educaționale și creșterea competitivității europene, multe programe au priorizat obiective economice și tehnologice în detrimentul incluziunii sociale. Totuși, aceste eforturi timpurii au pus bazele unor programe ulterioare, precum Leonardo da Vinci și SOCRATES, care au urmărit să echilibreze competitivitatea cu echitatea socială. Articolul subliniază necesitatea continuării cercetării asupra impactului uman al acestor programe, în special în ceea ce privește șomajul în rândul tinerilor și incluziunea grupurilor marginalizate.

Cuvinte cheie: CEE, COMETT, Erasmus, Eurotecnet, Lingua, PETRA, TEMPUS

I. Introduction

This article examines the successes and challenges of European educational programs initiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including COMETT, Erasmus, PETRA, Lingua, TEMPUS, and Eurotecnet. These programs aimed to foster cooperation between universities and industries, promote student and teacher mobility, improve vocational training, and encourage technological innovation across the European Community. This research employs a comparative analysis of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official European Community documents, such as policy papers, program guidelines, and evaluation reports, offering direct insights into the programs' objectives, implementation, and outcomes. Secondary literature comprises academic studies and analyses that provide contextualization and critical perspectives on these initiatives. Notably, the works of Antone Bousquet (1998) on education and training in the European Union, Cancaya et al. (2015) on the evolution of European Union educational policy, and Luce Pépin's seminal work (2006) on the history of European cooperation in education and training are consulted to develop the analysis. Furthermore, official publications like the European Commission's "History of the Erasmus Programme" and the

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture’s assessment “Cooperation in education in the EU (1976-1994)” provide valuable data and official perspectives. By analyzing primary sources, this research will evaluate the extent to which each program achieved its stated objectives. It will explore factors contributing to their successes, such as effective program design, adequate funding, and strong institutional support. Conversely, it will identify challenges encountered, including bureaucratic hurdles, disparities in national education systems, and varying levels of participation across member states.

After the adoption of the Single European Act, between 1986 and 1992, the Economic European Community (EEC) intensified its educational initiatives to meet the labor force needs of the market and industry. The new measures included educational programs for universities and, later on, for pre-university education, aimed at fostering a multicultural Europe¹. In the lead-up to the 1989 European Parliament elections, the Commission and member states drafted a document concerning the COMETT, Erasmus, Lingua, and “Youth for Europe” educational programs². For the 1990-1994 period, one billion ECU³ was allocated. The development and strengthening of ties between institutions and partners were driven by the originality and value of the programs, as well as by transnational cooperation in three major areas:

1. Transnational networks allowed individuals and institutions to meet, share experiences and challenges, and exchange best practices;
2. Mobility schemes provided teachers and students the opportunity to gain practical experience in other member states, while educational and training institutions could develop sustainable collaborative projects;
3. The creation of joint transnational projects aimed at developing innovative European strategies in education, as well as in the content of vocational training⁴.

¹ Seda Cancaya, Önder Kutlu, and Esra Cebeci, “The Educational Policy of European Union,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174 (2015): 888.

² Council of the European Communities, “89/489/EEC: Council Decision of 28 July 1989 establishing an action programme to promote foreign language competence in the European Community (Lingua),” *Official Journal*, nr. L 239, (16.08.1989): 24-32, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:31989D0489&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:31989D0489&from=EN;);

Commission of the European Communities, “Communication from the Commission to the Council. Education and training in the European Community. Guidelines for the medium term: 1989-1992”, COM (89) 236 final, Bruxelles, (02.06.1989): 3-29, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1989:0236:FIN:EN:PDF>.

³ The currency of the EEC, precursor of the Euro.

⁴ Antoine Bousquet, *Education et formation dans l'Union européenne. Un espace de coopération* (Paris: La

The responsibility for the content and structure of the education system remained a concern of the member states, but there were some mild attempts to restructure education issues at the European level.

Reports from the Commission, following the implementation of these programs, indicated that the results achieved were due to the enthusiasm and dedication of teachers, students, employees, and policymakers from various member states⁵. Even before the invention of the Internet, in the 1980s, the first proposals were drafted regarding the introduction of new information technologies in education and training⁶. The Commission was invited to promote adult education and highlight the potential of these new technologies, recognizing their immense importance. Thus, the first large-scale program, initiated on February 28, 1984, for a five-year period, was the European Strategic Program for Research and Development in Information Technology, known as ESPRIT. In 1988, a second program, DELTA, was introduced, which focused on applying advanced technologies in the learning process. After 1990, the Community aimed to integrate new technologies into education and training systems.

II. COMETT I and II

COMETT I⁷ was the first European education program designed to encourage and stimulate exchanges between universities and the labor market (industry), as well as training in technology. It was adopted on July 24th, 1986, and served as the counterpart to ESPRIT in the field of research and development. The second phase, COMETT II, was launched on December 16th,

Documentation française, 1998): 44.

⁵ Commission of the European Communities, “Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, EC education and training programmes 1986-1992: results and achievements: an overview”, doc. COM (93), no. 151 final, (05.051993): 29, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4773/1/4773.pdf>.

⁶ Council of the European Communities, “Council resolution of 2 June 1983 concerning vocational training measures relating to new information technologies”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, no. C 166/1, (25.06.1983): 2-3, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31983Y0625\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31983Y0625(01)).

⁷ Council of the European Communities, “Council Decision of 24 July 1986 adopting the programme on cooperation between universities and enterprises regarding training in the field of technology (Comett)”, 86/365/EEC, 1986, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, nr. L 222, (08.08.1986): 17–21, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11015a>.

1988, expanding the program's scope to include innovation and technology transfer. The goal of the program was to support and encourage the exchange of experiences, the use of training resources at the community level, and the promotion of gender equality⁸.

COMETT had five independent areas of action, each representing a program line: creating a network of European training partnerships between universities and businesses; exchanges of students and industry specialists; developing joint projects between higher education institutions and companies in the field of training; multilateral cooperation for the development of multimedia training systems, open and distance learning; and additional measures to monitor the progress of the COMETT I program⁹.

During the implementation process, the Commission was supported by a Committee. This Committee consisted of two representatives from each member state and two representatives from social partners, who acted as observers. The Committee was responsible for maintaining the link between COMETT and similar actions in the member states. Its role was to provide opinions on guidelines, financial assistance, and project selection. Information Centers were established to support, promote, and disseminate information, while a group of experts within the Commission provided technical advice. The results of the program were outstanding. Between 1987 and 1989, over 1,350 projects were launched with the Commission's support, totaling 52.6 million ECU¹⁰. The funded projects led to the creation of 125 partnerships and approximately 4,000 student internships, 232 grants for staff exchanges between institutions, and 329 projects for the development of multimedia training systems. Similar exchanges were also established through the DELTA program, which focused on advancing learning in Europe using cutting-edge technologies.

The COMETT program was later extended in 1990 to include countries from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)¹¹. A comparative analysis of the COMETT I and II, DELTA, and ESPRIT programs demonstrated the European institutions' interest in achieving high performance at both the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ Luce Pépin, *Histoire de la coopération européenne dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation* (Bruxelles: CE DG Education and Culture, 2006): 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, "Cooperation in education in the EU (1976-1994)", Studies no. 5, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities* (1994): 18, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/818ab19b-db90-43d7-8094-d660976cb0c8/language-en>.

member state and community levels by using new technologies across various fields, creating transnational cooperation networks. The common goal of these programs was to foster connections among Europeans, drawing on their shared history and traditions. One positive aspect was the increase in the budget for COMETT II by 230 million ECU, five times the budget of the first phase. The program was also opened to EFTA countries, despite concerns about insufficient funding. The results showed the benefit of pooling technical, educational, and financial resources.

As for the objectives of COMETT I and II, they primarily focused on industrial aspects and increasing European competitiveness, while social and educational objectives were secondary. From the outset, the program targeted individuals who were professionally trained at a European level, familiar with new technologies, and knowledgeable about the economic and social characteristics of European regions. Technological changes in the 1980s had social implications, which concerned the European Social Fund, whose aim was to address high unemployment rates and promote job creation. The activities within COMETT I and II led to joint education and training programs that were beneficial for businesses' needs. However, a negative aspect was that COMETT primarily focused on training future leaders in European politics and business and did not prioritize protecting vulnerable groups (women, the unemployed, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and those lacking experience in the field) who struggled to adapt to the new technological changes. The program did not directly address the high unemployment of the 1980s, but it recognized the importance of new technologies and the need to adapt education and training systems at both the member state and European Community levels in order to enhance competitiveness.

III. Erasmus

Another program aimed at fostering cooperation between universities and student mobility was Erasmus¹². In December 1985, the Commission proposed a program to the Council in Brussels that encouraged the mobility of both university teachers and students, as well as the mutual recognition of

¹² Gilles Ferréol, *Dicționarul Uniunii Europene* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2001): 76; Luciana Ghica, *Enciclopedia Uniunii Europene. Ediția a treia*, (București: Editura Meronia, 2007), 170.

qualifications¹³. The program was named after the renowned humanist, philosopher, and theologian Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), evoking the Renaissance period, when intellectuals could freely travel across Europe to share their ideas. Erasmus lived and worked in various parts of Europe, seeking new experiences through contact with different countries and cultures¹⁴. He bequeathed his estate to the University of Basel and is considered a pioneer of academic mobility.

The name Erasmus is also an acronym for *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*. The development of academic and cultural exchanges between European universities originated with Italian scientific consultant Sofia Corradi, who was present at a conference of university rectors in Italy. This idea was later taken up by the student association EGEE, and its founder, Franck Biancheri, convinced the President of France to support the initiative. The program was officially adopted on June 15th, 1987¹⁵, after 18 months of lengthy negotiations in the Council of Education Ministers, due to initial skepticism from the UK, Germany, and France. Debates around student mobility, the standardization of courses, and diplomas led to the implementation of the Erasmus program, which co-financed the mobility of students and young researchers across Europe, starting in 1980¹⁶.

The pilot program launched at the beginning of the 1987 academic year, with a three-year budget of 85 million ECU. In its first year, 3,244 students from 11 countries benefited from the program. It was later renewed for the 1990–1994 period with a budget of 192 million ECU¹⁷. Erasmus quickly found success

¹³ Commission of the European Communities, “Commission proposal for a Council Decision adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)”, COM (85) 756 final, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, no. C73, (02.04.1986): 4-7, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:51985PC0756&from=EN>.

¹⁴ European Commission Education and Training, “History of the Erasmus programme”, https://web.archive.org/web/20130404063516/http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/history_en.htm.

¹⁵ Council of the European Communities, “Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)”, doc. 87/327/EEC, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L166, (25.06.1987): 20-24, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31987D0327&from=EN>.

¹⁶ Zsuzsanna Gyimesi, Pim Huijnen, and Lars Lehmann, “Education and Knowledge Transfer in Contemporary History (ca. 1900-2000)”, in *The European Experience. A Multi-Perspective History Modern Europe, 1500 – 2000*, ed. Jan Hansen et al. (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 524.

¹⁷ Pépin, *Histoire de la coopération européenne*, 2006, 118.

due to the involvement of member states¹⁸, remote regions, and an increasing number of universities, in contrast to the bilateral exchanges previously conducted between universities outside the Union. The cooperation program developed along three main lines: creating a network of cooperation between universities; mobility schemes with financial support; and academic recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad.

One of the most significant aspects was the development of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for Erasmus, ensuring that mobility schemes were both attractive and beneficial. Erasmus students were proud of the experience they gained while studying in another member state, which had a positive impact on their home communities as well. This opportunity was open to students of all disciplines and allowed universities to establish partnerships with other institutions, offering joint courses. Additionally, it was ensured that any study period spent abroad would be recognized as an integral part of the student's final qualification. The program was highly regarded both nationally and internationally, becoming a model for other regions and initiatives, such as Tempus and Nordplus (among Nordic countries). Students could participate in mobility programs starting in their second year of university, for periods ranging from three to twelve months per year¹⁹.

The main obstacle encountered over time was financial in nature, as the Council was forced to cut half of the budget proposed by the Commission. Despite these challenges, between 1987 and 2013, approximately 3 million students benefited from this program²⁰.

IV. PETRA I and II

Elevated unemployment rates presented a significant challenge to European Community member states. The transition from an educational setting to the labor market posed a critical issue for young individuals, necessitating the implementation of proactive policy interventions. To address

¹⁸ Ceri Jones Hywel, "Education in a Changing Europe", Charles Gittins Memorial Lecture presented at the University College of Wales, Swansea, 1992 (16.03.1992): 7-8, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED354373.pdf>.

¹⁹ Pépin, *Histoire de la coopération européenne*, 2006, 119.

²⁰ European Commission, "Memo: Erasmus Programme in 2012-2013: the figures explained", Bruxelles, (10 July 2014): 2, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_14_476.

this, the action program for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult life and work (PETRA) was adopted on December 1st, 1987²¹, focusing on the initial training of young people. It was implemented between 1988 and 1992, later renewed as PETRA II²² and concluded in 1994, before being incorporated into the Leonardo program in 1995. Its aim was to establish new standards for initial vocational training. PETRA supported the efforts of member states and ensured that all young people up to the age of 28 who wished to do so could receive one or more years of vocational training beyond compulsory education²³.

In 1994, the program was evaluated by the Commission, and the results were positive. Although financial resources were limited, the program provided support for national policies. By June 1993, around 800 trainers had benefited from thematic visits focused on the PETRA program. In total, 100,000 young people and 20,000 teachers received assistance for transnational activities and project implementation, and 27 were guided in career counseling and training centers established in the member states²⁴.

The analysis of PETRA I and II revealed that, like the COMETT program, PETRA promoted equal opportunities for young men and women. However, it also showed that not all of its objectives were achieved, priority needing to be put on reducing the number of unqualified young people, the need for vocational training with a focus on practical skills at the community level, and the dissemination of innovation in initial vocational training across the European Community. The experience gained from this program laid the foundation for the creation of the Leonardo da Vinci program.

²¹ Council of the European Communities, “Council decision of 1 December 1987 concerning an action programme for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life”, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities*, 87/569/EEC, L 346, EUR-Lex (10.12.1987): 31-33, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31987D0569&from=ES>.

²² Council of the European Communities, “Council decision of 22 July 1991 amending Decision 87/569/EEC concerning an action programme for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life (PETRA)”, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities*, L214, EUR-Lex (2.08.1991): 69-76, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31991D0387&from=ES>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴ Commission of the European Communities, “Report on the implementation of the PETRA programme. Action programme for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life. Presented by the Commission under Article 8 of Decision 91/387/EEC”, COM (93) 704 final, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities* (14.01.1994): 13, <http://aei-dev.library.pitt.edu/5798/>.

We cannot speak about promoting mobility and mutual understanding without highlighting the importance of learning foreign languages for citizens. The European project demonstrated that promoting economic and scientific cooperation between member states was not possible without freedom of movement. Therefore, learning foreign languages and preserving the cultural identity of each country were absolutely essential aspects at the community level from the very beginning. In 1984, education ministers emphasized the importance of the statement, “Knowledge of foreign languages is a key element in the European project”²⁵. The Community recognized that it was absolutely necessary for more citizens to be able to communicate in at least two foreign languages, in addition to their national language. The Adonnino report on a “Europe of Citizens,” published in 1985, called for the implementation of a policy proposed by the education ministers that would enable as many young people as possible to acquire practical language skills and allow foreign language teachers to participate in training placements in the country whose language they teach.

V. LINGUA

After the launch of the COMETT, Erasmus, and PETRA programs, the Commission proposed the implementation of the language teaching program, LINGUA, on December 21st, 1988. The adoption of the program by the Council was difficult, and Javier Solana, President of the Council of Ministers of Education, put in a great deal of effort to achieve consensus. LINGUA was launched on July 28th, 1989²⁶, for a period of five years, with a budget of 200 million ECU. The program was accessible to individuals aged between 16 and 25 who had completed compulsory education and were participating in vocational training. The main objective of the program was to improve both the quality and quantity of citizens’ language skills, as well as to enhance the training of foreign language teachers and trainers. Additionally, the development of initial training for future foreign language teachers was a priority. Partnerships

²⁵ Pépin, *Histoire de la coopération européenne*, 2006, 122.

²⁶ Council of the European Communities, “Council decision of 28 July 1989 establishing an action programme to promote foreign language competence in the European Community”, *Official Publications of the European Communities*, L239, EUR-Lex (16.08.1989): 24-32, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31989D0489&from=en>.

between specialists promoted the development of innovative training modules. The LINGUA project targeted both the study of the official languages of the Community and lesser-known languages, such as Irish and Luxembourgish.²⁷

The results achieved between 1990 and 1994 showed that 83,000 young people and 8,000 teachers participated in joint educational projects. Additionally, 4,000 interschool partnerships and 800 partnerships for foreign language teacher training programs were established, aimed at developing language skills, including for the business sector. Of the total number of foreign languages targeted by the proposed projects, 55% were those less commonly spoken within the Community²⁸.

This program highlighted the importance of preserving the Community's linguistic heritage, making it more visible and creating synergies between organizations that had little prior experience working together. After ten years, LINGUA was highly regarded in all educational systems and spurred the introduction of foreign language learning into school curricula²⁹. In most member states, a foreign language was studied as a mandatory subject, starting in primary school by the third year of study during the 1995-1996 school year, with the exception of the UK and Ireland. According to the study, the most widely studied foreign language in primary schools across the European Union was English, especially in Spanish and Finnish institutions. A Eurobarometer survey from 2001 on Europeans' foreign language learning showed that 71% of Europe's population believed that everyone should speak at least one language of the Community besides their mother tongue.

Positive aspects of the program included its flexibility and the possibility of extending collaboration with other Community programs like PETRA and COMETT, bringing foreign languages onto the European political agenda, raising awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, and promoting lesser-taught languages. The program continued to develop even after its conclusion, within the frameworks of the Erasmus, SOCRATES, and Leonardo da Vinci programs. Ten years after its implementation, it was concluded that the development of education in member states was due to the introduction of foreign languages

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁸ Commission of the European Communities, "Report from the Commission to the Council. Lingua programme 1994. Activity report", COM (95), 458 final, EUR-Lex (9 October 1995): 19-34. <http://aci.pitt.edu/9657/1/9657.pdf>.

²⁹ Eurydice, *Foreign Language Teaching in Schools in Europe* (Bruxelles: Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2001): 54, https://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/eurydice/foreign_language_teaching_EN_2001.pdf.

into school curricula from an early age, offering young people a set of cultural values. A negative aspect was that the program did not address other school categories, specifically young people aged 11 to 18 enrolled in state education.

VI. TEMPUS

TEMPUS was the last of the programs adopted in the second half of the 1980s, but it did not follow the same path as its predecessors. The fall of the Berlin Wall led to significant political changes. The European Community was deeply affected by the scale of the events, and the Commission acted to help the countries of Central and Eastern Europe transition toward democracy by ensuring economic, technical, material, and intellectual cooperation³⁰. At the end of 1989, the Commission created a program to support the process of economic and social reform. This was the Action Plan for Coordinated Assistance to Poland and Hungary (PHARE), which was allocated 300 million ECU.³¹

On December 14th, 1989, the Ministers of Education made decisions regarding the establishment of relations with Central and Eastern European countries in the areas of training and education. The European Council, which met in Strasbourg between December 8th-9th, 1989, addressed the issue of former communist countries accessing funds for education and the creation of the European Training Foundation. Initially, the program was targeted at Poland and Hungary, but it was later extended to include East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Romania joined the program in 1991. The European Commission created a new program tailored to the needs of these countries, called TEMPUS³², which complemented PHARE. Larger amounts of funding were provided to initiate reforms in higher education based on the specific needs of these countries as quickly as possible. The aim was to align the educational systems of former communist states with those of the West, to

³⁰ Council of the European Communities, “Council regulation no 3906/ 89 of 18 December 1989 on economic aid to the Republic of Hungary and the Polish Peoples Republic”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, No. L375, EUR-Lex (23.12.1989): 1-2, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31989R3906&from=EN>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² Council of the European Communities, “Council Decision of 7 May 1990 establishing a trans - European mobility scheme for university studies, (TEMPUS)”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L131, EUR-Lex (23.05.1990): 21-26, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31990D0233&from=SV>.

facilitate the integration of European Union educational programs into Central and Eastern Europe³³.

During the first phase, a common curriculum was developed, and the themes selected by the countries aligned with their specific needs. Joint European projects received financial benefits for one year and then for two to three years. Additionally, individual mobility grants were provided for academic and administrative staff to participate in specific activities in other countries. Through a network of national offices in Central and Eastern European countries and information points in member states, TEMPUS established strong links and transnational working methods with all the states. The program helped train a new generation of academics and managers needed in these countries. Between 1990 and 2000, TEMPUS supported the development of over 2,200 joint projects, 17,000 individual mobility grants, 750 other types of projects, and funded 180,000 mobility opportunities³⁴. Romania accessed TEMPUS PHARE funds starting in 1991.

The data indicated a quantitative development in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, while the qualitative assessment highlighted that the desired levels of parity between Western and Central-Eastern European partners were not reached. The information provided by program documents allowed us to confirm that the experience within the TEMPUS PHARE program was positive, and the financial allocations to former communist states enabled the implementation of reforms that would not have been possible otherwise. In Romania, the Ministry of Education took significant steps in the reform process, including the establishment of a National Council for Evaluation and Examination. Efforts were made to establish programs promoting tolerance and interethnic understanding. Regarding the Roma population, a specific number of admission places were allocated for teacher training or university spots in the field of administration during 1998–1999. Since 1997, Romania has participated in the European Union’s Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, and Youth for Europe programs. Between 1997-1998, there were 321 beneficiaries in the Socrates program, 767 in Leonardo da Vinci, and 800 in the Youth for Europe program.

³³ Ibid., 22.

³⁴ Róisín McCabe, Philippe Ruffio and Pia Heinämäki, *Tempus@20 – A retrospective of the Tempus programme over the past twenty years, 1990-2010* (Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011), 51-54.

The TEMPUS program facilitated partnerships between universities and enterprises within the European Union. One drawback was the non-participation of all member states in the program. Nevertheless, TEMPUS contributed to study programs for foreign language learning and curriculum development, opened opportunities for internationalization in education, and supported cooperation and project implementation. The program prepared the necessary human resources to align educational systems and enabled participation in European educational programs. Former communist states became familiar with the criteria for academic credit recognition and the preparation of young people for mobility.

The 1990s were marked by a slow labor market and rapid technological changes, highlighting the need for skill renewal and theoretical knowledge updates. Governments of member states, at all levels, along with companies, placed increased importance on continuous training, particularly in sectors requiring restructuring. Similarly, the European Social Fund focused on integrating young people into the workforce, reducing unemployment, and retraining to prevent social exclusion. As a result, expanding existing education programs became necessary, and the Commission proposed new programs to strengthen vocational training.³⁵

The FORCE program³⁶, adopted by the Council on May 29th, 1990, aimed to encourage investment in continuous training, identify needs for new qualifications, support innovation in change management, and promote new methods, equipment, experience exchange, and the dissemination of best practices. The program targeted workers, especially in isolated regions where access to continuous training was challenging. This program created the largest network of companies and training associations, contributing to the improvement of professional development during that period³⁷.

³⁵ Pépin, *Histoire de la coopération européenne*, 2006, 124.

³⁶ Council of the European Communities, “Council decision of 29 May 1990 establishing an action programme for the development of continuing vocational training in the European Community (Force)”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, 90/267/EEC, L156, EUR-Lex (21.06.1990): 1-7, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31990D0267&from=en>.

³⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, “Cooperation in education in the EU (1976-1994)”, 1995, 34-35.

VII. Eurotecnet

Another European educational program, Eurotecnet, began on December 18th, 1989³⁸. This program promoted innovation in vocational training, with the aim of integrating new technologies into training systems. The new program came into effect on January 1st, 1990, operated for five years, and encompassed a series of national and transnational projects, along with community-level measures. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training was assisted by an Advisory Committee to ensure consistency and complementarity between this program and other community programs, as well as to monitor the program's development. Between 1991 and 1993, it achieved remarkable results, thanks in part to an initial budget of 7.5 million ECU³⁹.

During the 1990-1994 period, Eurotecnet published several scientific works, including *The Learning Organization*, which was made available in nine foreign languages and distributed to member states. Additionally, 64 workshops and training seminars were organized. The projects were grouped into four key areas: analysis of training needs with a focus on key qualifications (54 projects), transfer of methodologies for planning and managing human resource training (79 projects), provision of training services to enterprises (52 projects), and pedagogical innovation approaches (101 projects)⁴⁰. Dissemination activities were organized in two ways: at the member state level or at the community level. In the first case, strategic national conferences were held in 12 countries, starting with a needs analysis. In the second case, 18 transnational seminars were organized in the member states, and on November 11st-12nd, 1994, a conference was held on the theme *Vocational Training and Innovation in Europe*⁴¹. The program contributed to innovation and also established connections with other community programs such as FORCE, PETRA, and COMETT. A total of 77

³⁸ Council of the European Communities, “Council Decision of 18 December 1989 establishing an action programme to promote innovation in the field of vocational training resulting from technological change in the European Community (Eurotecnet)”, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L393, EUR-Lex (30.12.1989): 29-34, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11017&from=GA>.

³⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰ Commission of the European Communities, “Final report from the Commission on the Eurotecnet programme (1990-1994)”, COM(97) 386 final, not published in the *Official Journal*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eurotecnet.html>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Eurotecnet projects were supported by EUROFORM, a community initiative focused on human resource development. After 1995, the main actions of Eurotecnet were incorporated into the Leonardo da Vinci program.

VIII. Conclusions

In conclusion, the European educational programs launched in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as COMETT, Erasmus, PETRA, LINGUA, TEMPUS, and Eurotecnet, played a transformative role in shaping vocational training, mobility, and cooperation within the European Community. These initiatives not only facilitated collaboration between universities and industries but also promoted student and teacher mobility, enhanced vocational training standards, and underscored the importance of foreign language learning. They represented a significant step towards the creation of a European Higher Education Area and a more integrated European labor market, fostering a sense of shared European identity and purpose.

While these programs achieved significant successes, including fostering innovation, creating new transnational partnerships, and improving educational and professional opportunities, they also exhibited certain limitations. COMETT, for instance, succeeded in linking universities with industry and fostering technological advancement, but its impact on social inclusion and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups remained limited. Erasmus, PETRA, and LINGUA promoted mobility and cross-cultural understanding, yet their reach across diverse educational categories and their effectiveness in tackling issues like youth unemployment varied. TEMPUS and Eurotecnet played a crucial role in supporting Eastern European countries' transitions after 1989, facilitating the internationalization of education and the adoption of new technologies, but faced challenges in ensuring full participation from all member states and equitable distribution of resources.

Despite these limitations, the legacy of these programs in the late '80s and early '90s is one of progressive integration and modernization of educational systems across Europe. They laid the foundation for future initiatives, like Leonardo da Vinci and SOCRATES, ensuring continued focus on innovation, collaboration, and human capital development in a rapidly changing European landscape. These foundational programs provided valuable

lessons and experiences, highlighting the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation to address emerging challenges and priorities.

Moving forward, these early programs demonstrate the need for inclusive policies that balance competitiveness with social equity, ensuring that education and training initiatives benefit all citizens, regardless of background or socioeconomic status. They underscore the importance of long-term vision and sustained commitment to European cooperation in education, recognizing its crucial role in fostering economic growth, social cohesion, and active citizenship within an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. By learning from both the successes and shortcomings of these pioneering programs, the European Union can continue to strengthen its commitment to creating a dynamic and inclusive educational space that empowers individuals and promotes sustainable development.

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