

## EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS POLICIES ON INTERCULTURAL TEACHER TRAINING

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### ABSTRACT

*In the new globalized and pluralistic European society, the task of the school is to adapt to the continuous changes taking place, but also to constantly redefine its educational and inclusive function. In this sense, it becomes essential to train a teaching class capable of responding to the challenges posed by the presence of children and adolescents from different cultural contexts, as well as promoting educational and didactic paths with an intercultural matrix. In this regard, the present research work focuses on examining the proposals and indications provided by the European institutions to the various Member States regarding the intercultural training of teachers in training and in service.*

**KEYWORDS:** intercultural, formazione degli insegnanti, scuola, istituzioni europee.

### INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural society, the school plays a fundamental role in educating future generations in dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity. In this sense, it proves to be decidedly important to have competent teachers with regard to those principles proper to intercultural pedagogy aimed not only at promoting the integration and training of immigrant pupils, but also at educating native students to open up to otherness and intercultural dialogue; as well as, on the one hand, to favor the establishment within the classroom of a climate of comparison, collaboration and interaction between natives and foreigners and, on the other hand, to offer the latter the linguistic and didactic tools to achieve adequate education. On this front, one cannot fail to point out that, despite the undoubted consolidation – already for several decades now – of the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of European schools, as far as teacher training is concerned, there is still a significant gap between the obvious and repeatedly debated need to adapt the training of teaching staff to the new social reality and the effective implementation of adequate training courses focused on intercultural issues.

On a more general level, the factors which, in our opinion, contribute to fueling such a critical situation can be identified in the scarce attention paid to the role of intercultural pedagogy in university training courses for future teachers; as well as, as regards the acquisition or improvement of the intercultural skills of in-service teachers, the economic problems which often prevent schools from providing for this type of need and, in general, the low level of incentives for teachers to continue to update their skills throughout their professional career.

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In such a context, teacher training becomes "mainly the result of the individual ability to re-elaborate the experience that the teacher conducts every day in the field" and, for many teachers, the presence of immigrant pupils in the classroom represents the only "opportunity from which to draw acquisitions and learning" [1]

Obviously, experience 'in the field' can have a fundamental value as regards the knowledge of concrete situations; by itself, however, it is by no means sufficient. In fact, this must be accompanied by adequate intercultural methodological and didactic skills that allow teachers to "leave the canons of linear transmission to dialogue with particular needs" [2] and above all "to insert the intercultural perspective in school disciplines".

On this front it is worth noting that, regardless of the indications on the contents to be promoted within the curricula, the real challenge of the intercultural approach in the school environment lies in the ability of the teachers and, in general of the school, to guarantee its implementation.

## **2. The actions undertaken by the European institutions for teachers**

The need to provide effective intercultural training for teachers and all those who, in various capacities, work in schools has been reiterated several times over the last few decades, both by the European institutions and by many scholars who have addressed the issue of education and integration of immigrant pupils in schools on the European continent.

In this regard, among the numerous initiatives carried out by the Council of Europe, it is worth mentioning the Recommendation N.R. (84) 18 to Member States on teacher training in education for intercultural understanding particularly in a context of migration [3].

In this Recommendation, starting from the important premise that "The presence in schools in Europe of millions of children belonging to foreign cultural communities constitutes an asset and an important resource in the medium and long term, provided that educational policies are promoted which encourage open-mindedness and understanding of cultural differences", the Committee of Ministers supported the need to provide teachers with "training that prepares them to adopt an intercultural approach, training based on an awareness of the contribution that understanding between cultures and of the value and originality of each of them". Furthermore, convinced of the fundamental role played by teachers in such an educational context, the Committee urged the governments of the Member States to include in initial and in-service preparation "the intercultural dimension and that of understanding between communities" and, in particular, to make teachers aware of the "different forms of cultural expression existing in their national cultures and in those of the immigrant communities". On this front, moreover, the drafters of the document underlined the need to provide teachers with training that would make them capable of opposing ethnocentric attitudes and breaking down stereotypes: "they too - the document stated - must become creators of a movement of cultural exchange, to be able to develop and apply strategies which make it possible to become familiar with other cultures, to understand them, to consider them and to make students consider them; inform yourself about the social exchanges existing between the country of origin and the host country, not only in their cultural aspects but also in their historical perspective; become aware of the economic, social, political and historical causes and effects of emigration; thus becoming aware that the active participation of the migrant child in two cultures and his access to intercultural understanding largely depend on the conditions of stay, work and study in the host country".

In this regard, it was recommended to provide prospective and existing teachers with all necessary information on the countries of origin and host countries; to make them more receptive to cultures other than their own; to help them also to know and appreciate the educational approaches of other countries; to make them aware of the importance of direct contacts between schools and with the parents of the pupils, especially the immigrant ones.

To these important suggestions were added others of equal value, such as for example that of encouraging teachers to prepare and use in the classroom "material suitable for supporting the intercultural approach" or, also that of realizing, where possible, intercultural media libraries" from which you can draw to obtain documents, information and pedagogical aids aimed at providing useful information on the different cultures of origin of immigrant students. It was also proposed to promote the organization of seminars and internships, at national and international level, on the intercultural approach in education, "intended for teachers, teacher trainers, administrators, social operators and those in the market workers who have close professional relationships with the families of emigrants". On this front, moreover, it was also proposed to encourage, in the context of ongoing training, the planning of common internships for teachers from the host countries and for those from the countries of origin; as well as to support, "where possible, exchanges of pupil-teachers and teacher educators, in order to develop knowledge and understanding of different cultures and different teaching systems"; lastly, it was suggested to encourage the dissemination of documents concerning formation and intercultural education elaborated by or for the Council of Europe.

Finally, the Committee of Ministers made some specific recommendations both to the governments of the countries of origin and to those of the host countries. In particular, he recommended to the former that they provide teachers who were preparing to go and teach abroad with sufficient knowledge of the language and of the customs and traditions of the host countries; to think about developing an adequate method for teaching the language of origin to immigrant pupils present in schools in host countries; to prepare teachers to also play the role of intermediary between the school in the host country and the parents of immigrant pupils; to provide teachers with the necessary skills to also solve the educational and linguistic problems that may arise when immigrant pupils return to their country during schooling.

On the other hand, the Committee recommended to the governments of the receiving countries that they introduce linguistic preparation into teacher training which would enable them to effectively teach the language of the receiving country to immigrant pupils and to promote, where the need was, "the possibility of learning the rudiments of one of the languages of the countries of origin", reflecting "on this learning so that [the teachers themselves] open up to a different culture and understand the difficulties encountered by migrant children". Lastly, it was proposed to pay attention, within the framework of national legislation, to the status of teachers in the countries of origin and their role in the educational community; to offer these teachers the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the language, culture and education systems of the host countries; to "encourage in parallel the recruitment of teachers who have left emigration for

develop a pedagogy in school programs that integrates the cultural and linguistic elements of the country of origin in relation to the history of integration and the culture of the host society" [4].

In our opinion, this Recommendation assumes particular relevance, since it focuses solely on the intercultural training of teachers and offers concrete indications on how to intervene in this area. In this regard, in fact, the impression one gets from an examination of the large amount of Recommendations, Resolutions and various documents drawn up by the European institutions regarding the education of immigrant pupils or intercultural education - not only in those years, but also in subsequent ones - is that often, the issue of intercultural teacher training is still treated in a marginal way within the documents concerning the general training of teachers or, as we said, in contexts in which integration is mainly spoken of. In these documents, in most cases, we find only the repeated exhortations to the Member States to take the necessary measures for the initial and continuous training of teachers with regard to intercultural competences.

In the face of such a finding, however, one cannot doubt the validity of some indications provided over the years regarding this important problem.

In confirmation of this, here, we will limit ourselves to mentioning some documents drawn up by the representative bodies of the European Union which, in our opinion, testify in a decisive way the commitment undertaken by the European Union itself to encourage and increase the intercultural training of teachers.

Before examining these documents, it seems important to us to mention some reflections expressed by the European Commission, regarding the critical issues present in the general training of teaching staff, in the Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Improving the quality of teacher training 2007. In this document, the European Commission denounced, in a very direct way, the inadequacy of the progress made in the education sector with respect to the crucial objectives set previously by the Council of Europe as far as concerned the quality of teaching and the reduction of early school leaving. In this regard, the Commission noted a close correlation between these two important issues and specified that teacher training had to become "one of the main objectives of the European education systems if rapid progress is to be made to achieve the common objectives defined in the Education program and training 2010" [5].

Starting from the observation that teacher training systems are often not adequately equipped to offer valid preparation, the European Commission underlined that, according to what had emerged from some recent surveys, "almost all countries didactic skills and difficulties in updating the latter". The gaps related in particular to "the lack of skills necessary to deal with the new evolution of education (including individualized learning, preparing pupils for autonomous learning, the ability to manage heterogeneous classrooms, preparing learners for optimal exploitation of ICT etc.)". In most Member States, there was 'a lack of systematic coordination between the various elements of teacher education', resulting in 'a lack of coherence and continuity, especially between the teacher's initial professional education and subsequent professional development, continuing education and professional development". Quite often these processes were unrelated to academic development and improvement or research in teaching.

Furthermore, the incentives for teachers to keep upgrading their skills throughout their professional careers were too weak: 'investments in teacher training and continuing education are very limited across the European Union, as is the continuous training available to teachers during their working activity". Furthermore, the European Commission complained that continuing training for teachers was compulsory only in some Member States and that, however, even in these countries, teachers were not obliged to follow this type of training.

On this aspect, however, it was also specified that, even where there was the possibility of following training, this generally did not exceed 20 hours a year: "In no Member State does the compulsory minimum training exceed five days a year and in most countries only three days of training per year are compulsory. Furthermore, the fact that continuous training may be compulsory does not in any way indicate what the real participation rate is".

Furthermore, as regards the new school teachers, in the aforementioned Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Improving the quality of teacher training was done

note that only half of the Member States 'offer them some kind of support at a systematic level (e.g. integration, training, mentoring) during the first year of education. Only in a third of countries are there specific contexts to help teachers who have difficulties in carrying out their work". With regard to the skills needed to adequately carry out the teaching role, the Commission argued that teachers should have been able to acquire, at any stage of their career, not only the skills related to their teaching subject, but also the basic pedagogical knowledge to be able to help their students realize their full potential. In particular, they had to show that they possess the skills necessary to "identify the specific needs of each learner and respond to these needs with a wide range of instructional strategies; support the development of young people into fully independent lifelong learners; help young people acquire the skills listed in the Common European Framework of Reference on Skills; working

in multicultural contexts (including the ability to understand the value of diversity and respect for difference); as well as work closely with colleagues, parents and the wider community” [5].

The White Paper on intercultural dialogue «Living together in equal dignity» (2008) [6] was placed on a more specific level, and therefore strictly linked to the question of intercultural competences. In this important document, the Council of Europe, after specifying that "the skills necessary for intercultural dialogue are not automatic: they must be acquired, practiced and nurtured throughout life", underlined the importance of the role of educators at all levels "both in strengthening intercultural dialogue and in preparing future generations for dialogue". In this regard, the document underlined the need to include in teacher training programs "pedagogical strategies and working methods that prepare them to handle the new situations brought about by diversity, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism and marginalization, and to resolve conflicts peacefully". In this regard, teachers' training institutions were also urged to design "quality assurance tools inspired by education for democratic citizenship, taking into account the intercultural dimension", and to develop "indicators and tools for self-assessment and self-centred development "; as well as to strengthen "intercultural education and the management of diversity in the framework of lifelong learning" [6] and to "develop complementary tools to encourage pupils to exercise critical and autonomous judgment which also includes a critical evaluation of their own reactions and attitudes of facing different cultures". All pupils, the document concluded, "should be able to improve their multilingual skills. Intercultural practice and learning should be incorporated into initial and continuing teacher education activity" [6].

### **3. The Council of Europe guidelines for European teachers**

In the same year in which the White Paper on intercultural dialogue «Living together in equal dignity» (2008) was published, the North-South Center (CNS) of the Council of Europe, with the aim of providing teachers with further assistance in understanding and put intercultural education into practice in European schools, published the Guidelines for intercultural education. A handbook for educators to know and implement intercultural education [7].

This document, in addition to representing a valid tool for intercultural pedagogical training, raises a series of questions about the responsibilities of teachers and the role of educational institutions in promoting intercultural education.

In this context, the task attributed to intercultural education is to "develop learning communities" within which pupils and teachers are encouraged to work together and to reflect on global problems through new educational methods aimed at promoting the ability to face these problems "with an open and critical spirit", leading them to reflect and encouraging them "to share points of view in support of new evidence or rational arguments", to evaluate situations assuming different points of view, actively opposing prejudices and stereotypes [7].

In this regard, some fundamental skills were indicated for the students to acquire and, in particular, it was proposed to help them: "to familiarize themselves with the cultural variety of languages and codes, in order to favor mutual understanding"; to appreciate the importance "of cooperation, within the framework of shared tasks and of working with other individuals and groups who have the same objectives"; to acquire the ability to understand the opinions and feelings of others and, specifically, of those who belong to a different ethnic group and culture; to develop "dialogue skills, such as active listening, respect for the opinions of others and constructive affirmation of oneself", which allows one to interact with others "without denying the rights of others, but neither passive, allowing one's rights to be denied" [7].

On this basis, teachers and educators were urged to become aware of the need to constantly reaffirm the principles and values of intercultural education in all learning processes [7].

Continuing along this path, the Guidelines for intercultural education indicated to teachers a series of methodological approaches of an intercultural matrix and, at the same time, defined the parameters to be followed for the choice and evaluation of educational methods, also highlighting the importance to identify and understand the learning group and to create an environment suitable for this purpose. In particular, with regard to the learning group, the document urged teachers to always keep in mind, when designing intercultural programs or projects, the social and cultural conditions and origins of the learners, their age and needs individuals, and to choose the most appropriate educational methods. As for the learning context of global education, it had to be based on democratic principles, participation, cooperation and experience and had to promote critical thinking, democratic dialogue and integration [7].

The multiple suggestions offered to educators by the Guidelines for intercultural education, in our opinion, have the great merit of going amply into the concrete field and of providing clear and easily accessible indications to all teachers who find themselves working in multi-ethnic and multicultural.

It is not possible here to examine the innumerable suggestions provided on possible methods or approaches of an intercultural nature; we deem it appropriate to mention, however, at least the importance attributed to the interdisciplinary approach of intercultural education, which allows "to link specific knowledge to general knowledge and links with the various disciplines and provides the multi-perspective vision necessary to perceive the knowledge as a unified system, to understand ourselves and others in a complex and interdependent world, in which the realities of our lives can be complementary, but also contradictory. Passing from the culture of individualism to a culture of partnership presupposes the transformation from personal criteria relating to a single truth to collective criteria relating to multiple realities" [7].

In this regard, the importance of starting networking in the classroom is underlined, which makes it possible to establish concrete links with pupils and with teachers or associations from other countries, so that this comparison can arouse in native students the will to actively engage and review one's attitudes and one's system of values, in the awareness that one of the fundamental conditions of intercultural education is to know and learn to appreciate other cultural perspectives and other systems of values [7].

The commitment required of educators is to be aware that it is essential to continuously change, improve, reinvent and reaffirm these principles and values throughout the learning process.

#### **4. The European continuous training of the Pestalozzi Programme**

On this front, among the numerous activities of the Council of Europe, it is worth mentioning the Pestalozzi Program launched in 1969 within the framework of the European Cultural Convention and addressed to primary and secondary school teachers, school heads, inspectors, counsellors, teacher trainers, textbook authors, etc. of the signatory states.

This program is centered on a continuous training project and, for this purpose, European seminars are organized every year in which projects considered priorities by the Council of Europe are discussed, especially in the education sector. On a general level, the objectives of the program are: the dissemination of knowledge of the different school systems, of the innovative teaching/learning and training methods in use among the Member States; the broadening of cultural and professional horizons through comparisons of best teaching practices and educational-didactic materials; the sharing of the experiences and knowledge acquired during the courses attended at the educational institution to which they belong [8].

These seminars, in addition to offering teachers the opportunity to learn about the work carried out by the Council of Europe in the field of education, allow teachers to "get involved in an intercultural experience, to exchange information, ideas and teaching material

with colleagues from other countries , to act as multipliers to circulate information between colleagues and much more”.

As is known, the Pestalozzi Program also provides for the publication of scientific studies and guidelines aimed at promoting intergovernmental cooperation, human rights, learning, dialogue and intercultural skills, citizenship education, multilingualism, gender equality etc., as well as to provide extensive guidance on the objectives and vision of the Council of Europe with regard to these and other educational and social issues. Specifically, as far as the intercultural training of teachers is concerned, they seem particularly worthy to us

of note some reflections present in the second volume of the Pestalozzi Series published by the Council of Europe in 2012: *Intercultural competence for all. Preparation for living in a heterogeneous world* [9]. In this volume it is stated that, to ensure the success of intercultural education, it is necessary to broaden the competences of teachers; in fact, these can no longer be considered simply as "discipline transmitters", but must also act as guides and encourage interaction. Furthermore, to meet the specific needs of intercultural education, teachers not only need to be experts in their respective subjects, but they also need to have more skills in general pedagogy.

In this sense, teacher training should include diversity awareness programmes; implement empathy and intercultural knowledge; provide educators with the necessary tools to enable them to build learning communities and implement effective conflict resolution strategies; to create a democratic and impartial learning environment for students, helping them to become more proactive and constructive [9].

Furthermore, this training should also offer teachers the skills necessary to create teaching materials that culturally enhance reactive training and to develop teaching methodologies aimed at promoting cooperative learning and interpersonal relationships.

Quality assurance should foster reflective teachers and professionals who are willing to continue their self-development and also take on the roles of mediator, adviser, director, mentor, coach, learning facilitator, human rights activist, member of a activity group or a learning community [9].

These concepts are also taken up and expanded in the third volume of the Pestalozzi Series edited by the Council of Europe: *Developing intercultural competence through education* [10], in which, however, we feel, in our opinion, a greater urgency to make contemporary societies aware of the intercultural foundations and principles. The authors of the volume, in fact, point out that faced with a social reality increasingly characterized by racial prejudices, discrimination, hatred and racist manifestations, as well as by social, economic and political inequalities and by problems of misunderstanding between people from different cultural backgrounds , it becomes essential to promote the principle of mutual understanding and the development of intercultural competences. For this reason, intercultural education that aims to develop and improve these capacities can offer an essential contribution to peaceful coexistence [10].

Starting from these premises, the document illustrates the development of intercultural competences through education and offers a detailed description of the meaning of 'intercultural competence', namely: the specific attitudes, knowledge, skills and actions which, together, allow individuals to understand themselves and others in a context of diversity and to interact and communicate with those of different cultural origins from their own.

Furthermore, *Developing intercultural competence through education* also explains the reasons why it is necessary to promote such competences in a systematic way and describes the pedagogical and methodological approaches considered most appropriate for its development in the various formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts [10] .

As far as the school environment is concerned, *Developing intercultural competence through education* offers teachers countless suggestions to better understand the educational value of intercultural teaching. On this front, numerous practical activities are proposed to be

carried out in the classroom, such as those aimed at raising awareness of different points of view [10].

The activities mentioned clearly indicate not only the interest shown by the Council of Europe in this question, but also the awareness matured by this institution regarding the urgency of providing teachers with all the necessary tools to apply, also at a didactic level, the intercultural principles.

At the conclusion of this brief analysis, a further document which we think is important to mention is the Proposal for a resolution Learning the EU at school, presented by the European Parliament in 2015. This Proposal reiterates the need to "promote and encourage multilingual skills and intercultural interests of educators, as well as opportunities for mobility, peer learning and exchanges of best practices among teaching staff, for example through the organization of European-level seminars'. In such a context, moreover, the European Parliament underlines the importance of the role played by universities "in the preparation and training of highly qualified and motivated teachers and educators"; calls on the European Commission to support the Member States "who strive to make available, within universities, specialist qualification courses that are open and accessible both to enrolled students and to teachers and educators practicing their profession" ; highlights the importance of programs such as Erasmus+ in promoting "education and training, language skills, active citizenship, cultural awareness, intercultural understanding and various other valuable key and transversal skills"; underlines the merit of these programs in strengthening "European citizenship and notes the "need for strengthened and adequate financial support for these programmes, for a greater emphasis on their qualitative outcomes and for wider access to mobility, paying particular attention to teachers and to the other educators" [11].

As far as mobility is concerned, as can be seen from this and other documents prepared in recent decades, the European Union has often reiterated that, if it is true that the development of knowledge represents the engine that drives growth and social cohesion , it is equally true that the cornerstone of this development must be identified in learning mobility ("mobility for learning"), which has a strong impact on the personal and professional growth of students and workers and provides them with a significant set of skills linguistic, social and cultural.

In particular, as far as teachers are concerned, the European Commission's attention to learning mobility has progressively increased in recent years. Obviously, this interest stems from the awareness of the importance of the educational role of teachers in the European training of the new generations. Today, in fact, teachers are constantly urged to offer their students all the tools necessary to become full-fledged European citizens capable of facing the challenges posed by an increasingly composite and changing society.

In this regard, the emphasis is placed on the need to guarantee all educators the possibility of having formative and personal development experiences that lead them to come into direct contact with other educational and cultural realities and to get to know other points of view and other ways to go to school.

In this regard, it is worth noting that In the Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on the promotion of common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, the Council of Europe underlined that "One of the objectives of the ET 2020 framework for European cooperation in education and training, i.e. the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, was established on the basis that education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights, prevent and combat all forms of discrimination and racism and provide children, young people and adults with the tools to interact constructively with their peers from different backgrounds" [12].

In the face of such a prospect, however, the European Commission itself has had to ascertain the low adherence of teachers to European mobility programmes, due, in almost all countries, to the persistence of numerous obstacles of an administrative and legal nature [13].



Basically, what emerges from the analysis of the reports on this activity is that "global strategies to actively facilitate and promote mobility are rather the exception than the rule, and the results are not yet up to the real needs" [14].

Overall, it could be noted that, despite the existence of a Community framework clearly convinced of the importance of supporting mobility as a determining factor in improving the quality of education and training systems, national legislations have not yet fully understood the benefits deriving from transnational mobility

not only for the development of teachers' intercultural skills, but also for the personal and professional growth of the protagonists of training and of the entire education system.

Undoubtedly, since the 1990s up to today, European cooperation has made many steps forward in this field. To confirm this, it would be enough to think of the many interventions implemented by the European Union in the training and education sector - for example, through the Erasmus, Socrates, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and other programmes, as well as, currently, through the LLP program (Lifelong Learning programme) which concentrates in one large container all the actions put in place for the development of European cooperation - to increase the mobility of students and teachers, to perfect language skills and renew teaching practices [15]. However, especially at the national level, there are still too many gaps in terms of information, preparation, support and recognition of training experience abroad.

In fact, these critical issues clearly show how much, on a national level, full awareness of the need to promote a transnational European identity that goes beyond the limited state borders to interact with different cultures, to encourage the development of linguistic skills and to learn about new ways of training and carrying out teaching, as well as to promote that intercultural dialogue much desired by many, but not yet fully implemented.

Undoubtedly, in today's society, the challenges that teachers have to face are many compared to the past. In this sense, one cannot fail to note the different and increasingly demanding situations they have to deal with, think, for example, of how classes have changed – undeniably, today, they are more heterogeneous from a linguistic and cultural point of view, with pupils from a multiplicity of socio-economic backgrounds and with different needs – and, in general, the different grades and levels of schools.

In this respect, we seem to be able to agree with what was stated in the document Council Conclusions on European teachers and trainers of the future that, "although many teachers and trainers share many of the same challenges, there also exist, to varying degrees in different Member States, specific challenges related to different levels and types of education and training, including:

a) in early childhood education and care: difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified and adequately trained early childhood education and care professionals; aging workforce and gender imbalances, with a predominantly female workforce; unattractive working conditions, including a high child-to-staff ratio, and a lack of attractive career paths, as well as a lack of continuing professional development opportunities;

b) in school education: attracting and retaining high-potential students in initial teacher education, as well as attracting graduates and retaining in-service teachers are challenging; the teaching staff is ageing; there are also gender imbalances, with a predominance of female teachers, particularly in certain subjects and in some cycles of education; furthermore, the profession may be culturally unrepresentative of the community to which it is addressed; all of this is reflected in the fact that many Member States are facing shortages of teachers, either generally, in specific geographical areas, or in certain disciplines, (...), or shortages of teachers with skills to teach students with special needs, teaching in a multicultural or multilingual environment, or teaching students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds" [16].

## CONCLUSIONS

From what has emerged in this examination of the documents published over the last few decades by the Council of Europe and the European Commission regarding the intercultural training of teachers in training and in service, the will of these institutions to provide school systems with the various member countries the necessary tools to interpret the new demands of the current scholastic and social reality and to offer educational responses that go beyond the traditional conception of education based essentially on mere notional knowledge. Today, in fact, "education must, so to speak, simultaneously offer the maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and the compass that allows individuals to find their own route. In this perspective of the future, the traditional answers to the question of education, which are essentially quantitative and based on knowledge, are no longer adequate. It is not enough to provide a child, at the beginning of his life, with a wealth of knowledge on which he can draw for the rest of his life. Each individual must be enabled to seize every opportunity to learn throughout his life, both to expand his knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to adapt to a changing, complex and interdependent world" [17]. In this sense, both the White Paper and the Guidelines mentioned above represent valuable aid tools for teachers who want to acquire intercultural competences.

In this regard, however, it cannot be overlooked how much European countries still struggle to guarantee such preparation [18] and how much work there is to be done in every European country, including Romania where the intercultural phenomenon is on the rise, even if with different characteristics from other countries. In this context, the contribution of the European Studies Center of Agora University will be increasingly intense.

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