

## LA UNIÓN EUROPEA, UNA MATERIA QUE SE ABRE CAMINO EN LA EDUCACIÓN MADRILEÑA

## THE EUROPEAN UNION, A SUBJECT THAT IS MAKING ITS WAY INTO MADRILENIAN EDUCATION

### **M<sup>a</sup> Eugenia Melchor Sánchez-Huete.**

Graduate in History. Master's Degree in Contemporary History Education inspector. Madrid.

#### **Resumen**

*Este texto académico analiza el comportamiento de la Unión Europea como materia en el currículo educativo de la Comunidad de Madrid, haciendo hincapié en la importancia de educar a los estudiantes europeos en las dimensiones ética, histórica y socioeconómica de la Unión. Asimismo, aborda y profundiza en el funcionamiento y la evolución de la educación en la UE, desde el punto de vista identitario, para la formación de ciudadanos europeos conscientes.*

*Metodológicamente, el ensayo ahonda en los obstáculos y los desafíos a los que se enfrenta la UE, como el euroescepticismo y la defensa de las soberanías nacionales en algunos países miembros, dentro de un escenario complejo y no exento de amenazas, que van más allá del ámbito educativo.*

*Se enfatiza en la necesidad de una educación de calidad y de una formación permanente para los docentes, así como en el fomento de la participación activa de los alumnos en el aprendizaje sobre la UE que les permita ser más activos dentro de la Unión y comprender mejor su realidad cotidiana.*

*Como resultado, se destaca el impacto positivo en el sistema educativo madrileño, que está desarrollando los mimbres necesarios para poder convertirse en referencia en esta materia educativa en Europa.*

**Palabras clave:** 5504.02 Unión Europea, 50802.03 currículo Comunidad de Madrid, 50802.03 materia optativa, 50802.02 retos educación europea.

## **Abstract**

This academic essay analyses the behaviour of the European Union as a subject in the Community of Madrid's educational curriculum, emphasizing the importance of educating European students on the ethical, historical and socio-economic dimensions of the Union. It also addresses and elaborates on the performance and evolution of education in the EU, from an identity point of view, for the upbringing of conscious European citizens.

Methodologically, it delves into the obstacles and challenges the EU faces, such as Euroscepticism and the defence of national sovereignties from some member states, within a complex environment and not exempt from threats, which go beyond the educational field.

The need for quality education and permanent training for teachers is emphasized, as well as fostering students' active participation in learning about the EU, which enables them to be more active within the Union and to better understand its everyday reality.

As a result, is highlighted the positive impact on Madrid's education system, which is developing the necessary tools in order to become a reference on this educational subject in Europe.

**Key words:** 5504.02 European Union, 50802.03 curriculum Community of Madrid, 50802.03 optional subjects, 50802.02 European education challenges.

## **1. EUROPE STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO UNIFY ITS EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS**

Nobody is unaware that Europe still has a long way to go, especially when it comes to education and, above all, education in the basic education stages. This is, fundamentally, Primary Education, Compulsory Secondary Education and Basic Grade Vocational Training in our country (article 3.3 of Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, 2006, on Education, as amended by Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29).

These stages are characterized for being those in which the identity of the person and his or her belonging in society are shaped. Hence the importance that countries give to their curricula and to the organization of their teachings, because it is from them that their belonging and experience as a "social being", as described by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, is built. So, nothing new on the horizon.

In the light of this premise, it is appropriate that, from the educational community as a whole, to which we all belong to a greater or lesser extent, we demand (and acclaim) the need to respond to the great pending account that the European Union still has with education, at least if it wants to continue moving forward. In the same way that we can talk about other major challenges that are still far from being agreed and achieved, such as fiscal union or military union. Both tax collection and defense remain, to this day, the exclusive competence of the States.

The European Union, which was born and is configured as a great economic construction, and has proved to be so, has a yearning that goes beyond this pretension. Social convergence and the desire for cultural unity have always been on its roadmap, while respecting the recognition of national particularities.

However, there are difficulties such as the incorporation of countries with greater cultural and social differences, for instance Turkey, and threats such as a

possible extension of the war in Ukraine, the rise of nationalism or dissidence such as Brexit, among others.

The European Union itself has to navigate between these difficult to reconcile ups and downs, between union and disintegration. A clear symbol of this turbulence is the principle of subsidiarity, approved in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), signed in Maastricht in 1992. This mechanism regulates areas of shared competence between the EU and the Member States and excludes EU intervention in cases where the Member States can deal effectively with a matter on their own.

Union intervention would only be justified in cases where the objectives of a proposal cannot be satisfactorily achieved by the Member States and, moreover, added value could be added to such action if it were carried out through the Union.

Nevertheless, in the field of education, among the three conditions that must be met in order to be carried out, the member countries would not comply with the principle of necessity. In other words, the proposals could not be achieved by the country itself.

As Rafael Domingo Oslé, Spanish jurist and professor, holder of the Álvaro d'Ors Chair at the Culture and Society Institute, points out in his article entitled *Robert Schuman y la idea de Europa*, published on August 11, 2023 for the ABC newspaper, he highlights the figure of the man who is considered one of the great fathers of the process of European construction, and whom the jurist considers the person who best represents "the most genuine spirit of integration and European construction".

The Schuman Declaration, delivered by the French minister on May 9, 1950, in addition to explaining why we Europeans celebrate Europe Day on May 9 every year, is vital as a declaration of principles. Among its key quotations, it is worth noting that "Europe will not be built all at once or as a whole: it will be built through concrete achievements, first and foremost by creating a de facto

solidarity". Education, it seems, is one of these concrete achievements that build the Union.

## **2. EDUCATION, A CHALLENGE AND A COMMITMENT TO UNITY**

If we look at the road travelled so far, education is at the same time one of the great challenges for the EU and one of the great current commitments of our governments, understanding in this respect the particularities that, in addition, within our country, are conceived with seventeen administrations that have transferred competences in education.

We should not forget that it is through education that European citizenship and awareness are built. One of the great exponents and European reference can be found in Napoleon Bonaparte (as a statesman), who in addition to being responsible for a Civil Code consecrated to the principles of individual freedom, private property and equality of all citizens before the law, which has served as an example to our current democratic systems, was accompanied by other less known reforms, but enormously transcendent in the rebirth of our contemporary Europe, such as the reform of education.

If education had already been incorporated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, included in France as a preamble in the Constitution of 1793 and added as a Title in the Constitution of 1795 (Title X dedicated to public instruction), the Napoleonic stage will end with the establishment of a universal primary education that will create national awareness and will show the need for a common instruction that should be available to all citizens. It also included the question of patriotic festivities, the existence of higher schools and the coexistence between a public and a private network of education.

This urge to build citizenship remains very noticeable today, in an adverse environment where the United Kingdom is no longer part of the Union and in which international tensions require Europe to take a stance on the issue.

Our supranational entity as Europeans is not without its difficulties. The marked growing Euroscepticism in our neighboring countries is a reality. In parallel, the defense of national sovereignties, such as France, heir to the precepts of Jean-Marie Le Pen (defended to the hilt by his daughter and successor Marine Le Pen), which obtained 41.5% of the votes in the second round of the French Elysée elections, according to information published in the newspaper *El País* on April 25, 2022; the Italy of Giorgia Meloni, who has unceremoniously displaced the Democratic Party and the 5 Star Movement in her country or, even more vehemently if possible, the Hungary of Viktor Orban who, in the elections of April 8, 2018 obtained (in alliance), with his Fidesz party, a comfortable majority that adds up to 134 of the 199 seats, as pointed out by Daniel Iriarte in the digital newspaper *El Confidencial* on April 8, 2018. Therefore, these movements in Europe are consolidated and can be a good example of the obstacles that our Union has to face.

We see recurrent cases of countries that become very suspicious of their own cultural identity and, therefore, are very reluctant to approve by common agreement an educational standard that would be binding on all member countries. This is even more so in a supranational organization that has become accustomed to legislating through recommendations and provisions that are not binding.

The fluctuating skepticism towards the political powers and decision-making capacity of the European institutions is reflected, for example, in the low turnout of Europeans in the elections to the Parliament, which was 55.66% in the last elections in 2019, according to data from the European Parliament in collaboration with Kantar.

Regarding the area we are dealing with, education, it is notorious the interest that member countries have been building towards the European Union as an object of study in itself and that it is necessary to incorporate into the national curricula. Such implementation allows European citizens to build an identity of

"supranation", while becoming more aware of the importance that the decisions taken within the European Union directly affect our lives.

The European Union, created in the aftermath of the Second World War to unite democracies with a liberal spirit and an enlightened soul, has not always had the value that the great fathers of European construction would have wished for. Jean Monnet emphasized the value that Europe should give to education, the pillar on which everything else should be built.

And it is precisely this education, which had been relegated to the background within the objectives of Europe, which is now one of the great achievements of the Union, such as, for example, the creation of a European Education Area, the establishment of the homogenizing ECTS training credits or the educational policies by competences.

The presence of educational policies in our reality, have been giving prominence to the European Union itself, which is today better seen than before in view of its projects and the funding that accompanies them. Thus, our students are already European students, many of them Erasmus students who have learned and perfected languages in other countries.

### **3. HOW CAN WE CONTINUE TO REMAIN OBLIVIOUS TO THIS REALITY THAT IS PRESENT IN OUR LIVES?**

The Community of Madrid, in the development of the competences it has transferred in the field of education, published in 2019 the first of the five orders that have come to regulate the subjects of free autonomic configuration, today already repealed.

The study of the European Union was already conceived then, from an eminently empirical perspective, and which would be clarifying for the students. The main objective: to awaken interest in those aspects that are regulated in Europe. Ultimately, to get to know Europe better.

Today, in the curricular development derived from the Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, modified by the Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, the Community of Madrid, publishes the Order 1736/2023, of May 19, of the Vice-presidency, Ministry of Education and Universities, by which the catalogs of optional subjects that the centers may incorporate to their educational offer in the Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate in the Community of Madrid are established.

As Alain Lamassoure, politician and former MEP, points out in his work *L'Europe au défi de l'enseignement de l'Histoire*, the teaching of European history is becoming increasingly complex in a world living in peace and on a continent that has been reconciled. While numerous organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD or the Council of Europe multiply their advice and recommendations, the responsibility for education remains with the nations.

The European Union is offered as an optional subject in the Community of Madrid and the centers, by virtue of the autonomy granted to them by article 120 of the Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, modified by Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, can include it in their curricula.

This implies that students at the end of the Compulsory Secondary Education stage will be able to have a very approximate and practical knowledge of what the European Union is, of its functioning through the various institutions that compose it, of the policies that are generated within it and of the historical and cultural context that surrounds Europe. In this way, they will be able to better understand the world in which they live and be called upon to build the committed society of the future that the Union itself intends for its citizens.

In the presentation of the subject of "European Union" made by the aforementioned Order, there are themes in line with the sustainable development objectives of the 2030 Agenda projected by the United Nations Organization, as well as with the values of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union. Also, of



course, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Treaty on European Union.

If up to now, the European Union was dealt with in the classroom in a transversal manner, inserted in subjects such as Geography and History, Classical Culture and Economics, among others, the introduction of the European Union as a subject, per se, is indicative of the importance that today's societies attach to European affairs.

#### **4. BUT HOW DOES THE MADRID CURRICULUM ADDRESS THE TEACHING OF THE UNION?**

The subject on the European Union is structured in two courses, 3rd and 4th of Compulsory Secondary Education. Among the topics covered are the European Union as a geographical, economic, social and political space; European history and culture; the project of building the European Union; the objectives, principles and values of the Union; the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaties; and the functioning of the Union, its institutions and bodies.

From a methodological point of view, in the subject of the European Union, teachers usually encourage debate, research, and active participation, in such a way that students' oral expression and real knowledge of the influence that Europe has on their daily lives is promoted. Bringing contents closer to students through their daily practice is more attractive and motivating for them. The analysis of graphs, the assessment of the current geopolitical situation, the development of a critical spirit and the knowledge of the possibilities that Europe offers them as students, are some of the possibilities offered by this subject.

Regarding evaluation, teachers emphasize the importance of assessing not only written tests, but also original presentations by students, who are already used to working cooperatively and being evaluated with a previous rubric, which allows them to know what their teacher is going to look at when grading them and at the same time allows them to offer a quality formative evaluation, with a

view to improvement. The analysis of documents and their critical analysis becomes an important bastion in the evaluation of this subject.

Since its implementation in the 2019-2020 academic year, which was only offered in four institutes of the Community of Madrid, it is now taught in more than 100 public institutes, according to the education portal of the Community of Madrid. The Region has always encouraged students to take this subject with the aim of building European awareness, improving active citizenship and understanding European integration in an increasingly globalized world.

From a European perspective, the 2021 Annual Report on the education system in the Community of Madrid, which analyzes the evolution of educational indicators in relation to the Europe 2020 Strategy, pointed out the positive impact that programs such as Erasmus+ has had on our education system, as it has led to an increase in the number of teachers and students interested in European mobility. Moreover, the Erasmus+ accreditation has become a relevant achievement for the educational organizations in our region.

The Education, Science and Universities Councilor, Emilio Viciano, during a visit to the Parque de Lisboa Secondary School in Alcorcón on January 22, 2024, highlighted that "students can reaffirm the idea that the European Union is a reality that is worth protecting and defending, something that affects them directly and that, among other advantages, gives them the possibility of pursuing a degree at any university in the European Higher Education Area".

In a year in which elections to the European Parliament are on the horizon, between June 6 and 9, 2024, it is worth remembering the relevance of a subject on the European Union, as it offers students a deeper knowledge and greater involvement in it, which may explain the growth and strengthening in Madrid's academic organization.

Nevertheless, the challenges are still present today. As Javier M. Valle López points out, the deficient initial pedagogical training of teachers, especially secondary school teachers, is particularly striking: "In Spain, secondary school

teachers access their pedagogical training, their professional qualification as teachers, after having a bachelor's degree in a field of knowledge (physics, language and literature, philosophy...)". This is what is called a "consecutive" model. This is not the case in countries where the model followed is the so-called "simultaneous" model. In these countries, from the beginning of the degree program, graduates are trained to be teachers of some discipline.

As the philosopher and pedagogue Gregorio Luri points out, there is still a long way to go because institutions should listen more to the great experts on education, that is, to teachers. Referring to the conclusions drawn in the successive Pisa reports, he states that, although Spain does not obtain scandalous results in the worst sense of the word, he does not analyze in depth the differences by autonomous communities, which there are many, not to mention the great forgotten ones, which, from his point of view, are Ceuta and Melilla.

It will be our Administrations that will have to continue advancing in this arduous, challenging and exciting task, elaborating a good travel book in which all the territories participate in an equal manner, both at European and national level.

Education has a key role to play in strengthening the structures of the European Union and its uncertainty-filled sustainability. As the European Council points out in its recommendations, "countries must work to provide high quality education, training and lifelong learning; to support and train teachers to implement competence-based approaches to teaching and learning; and to advance assessment models, exploring different approaches to ensure the acquisition of key competences by all learners".

The student must be able to learn by himself and do it throughout life, an aspect that is already included in its article 5 bis, the Organic Law of Education 2/2006, of May 3, modified by the Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29.

This has to be one of the big bets of current educational policies in order to adapt to an increasingly volatile world with greater uncertainty, adapting the new currents of educational development and hand in hand with new technologies. Although there is still a long way to go, it seems that the Community of Madrid is making headway as one of the territories where most progress is being made in the implementation of all these criteria and which is called to have a tractor effect for other regions and countries.

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