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Declaration of Academic Integrity

I hereby confirm that I prepared this Master Thesis independently and on my own, by exclusive reliance on the tools and literature indicated therein. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced. Quotation marks are used around materials written verbatim from other sources. The thesis has not been submitted to any other examination board.

Vienna, 21 July 2014

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1 Introduction

The Master Thesis “The EU’s influence on Austria’s education policy” analyses the EU’s impact on national education systems with a special focus on Austria. Although EU member states have not transferred their competences to the EU in the area of education, the Union’s influence in this field has been steadily increasing over the past few years as EU countries opted to voluntarily participate in the EU’s education network, among other things in order to benefit from its various funds. In addition, new instruments involving continuous reporting and strict monitoring by the Commission significantly increased the “pressure” on member states in the last few years. At this point it has to be noted that the terms influence and impact are used in a very broad sense with the aim to present an overall picture rather than to provide measurable data. This approach was chosen on the basis of the insights gained from the theoretical part of the paper, which clearly showed, how difficult it is to measure the impact in this respect, as certain changes in national policies do not necessarily have to be attributed to the influence of the EU. Certain decisions might be in conformity with EU preferences, but may not be the result of EU pressure in the broader sense. Hence, it is often very difficult to make out the exact motive or triggering factor of a certain decision. Nevertheless, the research for this Master Thesis showed that there are indeed changes at national level that can be actually directly attributed to endeavours or influence of the EU.

The first part of the thesis provides an overview of different approaches to the concept of Europeanisation, which forms the theoretical basis of the paper. The theoretical part also includes the definition of the term “EU education policy”, which is used in the thesis. Chapter three presents the structure of the education system in Austria and shall serve as an orientation for further reference. Following the outline of the Austrian education system, the thesis deals with education cooperation at European level, including the legal basis, a historical overview, the governance mode “Open Method of Coordination” as well as bodies in the area of education at European level. Providing an insight into the EU’s education framework, strategy, instruments and programmes, chapter five covers Austria’s education cooperation with the EU. The theoretical and descriptive parts are linked in chapter six. Here reference is made to the Europeanisation debate by analysing chosen aspects and questions of the concept of Europeanisation on the basis of the descriptive part.

Points of criticism in this connection are covered in chapter seven. Finally, the main findings are summarised in the conclusion. The literature used for the research for this Master Thesis includes books and articles on the concept of Europeanisation and the transformation of education policy for the theoretical part as well as various official EU documents, reports by Austrian institutions as well as other research papers and articles dealing with this topic.

2 The concept of Europeanisation

A theoretical approach with respect to the influence of the European Union in a broader sense on a certain policy area at national level will provide the basis for further considerations of the thesis. The concept chosen as a framework for this topic is the concept of Europeanisation, which is not a theory as such, but rather describes certain processes, or can be even considered to be the process as such, that takes place at national level as a result of integration processes. Due to the lack of a uniform definition, the consulted literature on Europeanisation provides various approaches and characterisations of this phenomenon.

2.1 Various approaches

A quite broad definition is given by Bretherton and Mannin: “The concept of Europeanization seeks to explain politics, institutions, and policies in the region at supranational, national, and other levels of governance. It is thus applicable as an ongoing process with several historic layers that have previously included moments of fundamental change.” (Bretherton, Mannin 2013: Introduction) In their definition Vink and Graziano focus on the domestic implications and describe Europeanisation as “the domestic adaptation to European regional integration” (Vink, Graziano 2007:7) with a focus on “changes in national political systems that can be attributed to the development of European regional integration” (Vink, Graziano 2007:3). Regional integration is further described as cooperation on economic and political level between neighbouring countries or geographically close countries, not being restricted to the European Union. The European Free Trade Area (EFTA), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the Council of Europe (COE) are given as other examples for regional integration in form of regional institutions. Vink and Graziano see research with regard to the Europeanisation phenomenon as useful “to assess the effectiveness of European-level policies at the domestic level, as well as to understand how new European opportunities and constraints affect national politics.” (Vink, Graziano 2007:3) According to Vink and Graziano, research conducted on the basis of the Europeanisation concept mainly focuses on the implementation of EU policies at national level in areas that are located within the scope of EU authority, but also policy areas that are mainly governed at national level and

may involve case studies or quantitative research in connection with the implementation of EU policies. Some research was also dedicated to changes of organisational structures as a result of EU accession. As already mentioned, according to Vink and Graziano, the research outcome is primarily used to assess the effectiveness of the European system rather than focusing merely on the changes in national policies. In this respect the authors stress that Europeanisation is difficult to measure, since there are more visible direct effects of the European integration process, but also indirect, horizontal effects e.g. as a result of “increased policy competition between countries as a result of growing exchange of information” (Vink, Graziano 2007:16). This might also apply to the area of education policy, especially in view of lacking European acts that have to be transposed into national law and could be thus at least measured on a quantitative basis. Moreover, it is often difficult to determine, if a change in domestic policy can be actually attributed to European pressure in the broader sense or some European strategy, or simply to some alternative triggering factor. (cp. Vink, Graziano 2007:3-19)

This critical approach is very valuable for this paper, because it is generally quite easy to assume that any cooperation at European level is a result of some kind of European pressure, be it “just” peer pressure in case of voluntary, legally non-binding commitments. Although the paper does not aim at assessing the exact motives of each cooperation aspect of Austria’s education policy, this theoretical background is very helpful for the understanding of processes both at national and at European level.

The concept of Europeanisation evolved in the late 1990s as a result of some major political changes and the consequent need for a concept that would take the new reality into consideration. Apart from the end of the Cold War, Bretherton and Mannin also mention the Single European Act of 1986 as an important initiator of political transformation in Europe in connection with “a process of increasing economic and political homogenization” (2013:xxi). In times of the Cold War European integration was largely analysed on the basis of classical East-West dichotomy. Since the European Community was a very young project, research in this field was also a relatively young discipline. This implied not to see the European Community as an own research area, but rather to analyse the phenomenon of power being transferred to an international or supranational organisation. The existing theories as well as theories that were developed later (e.g. neofunctionalism, (liberal) intergovernmentalism, constructivism, (historic)

institutionalism) focused on the question, which actor – the member state or the organisation – controlled the integration process. Many researchers considered that the existing theories were not always able to keep pace with the developments and reflect the uniqueness of the European project. Bretherton and Mannin also write about the current situation as a “a new dichotomy between Europeanists, who study the new (only 53 years old) EU kid on the block, and comparativists, who continue to emphasize the role of the nation-state, the traditional building block of comparative politics”. (Bretherton, Mannin 2013: xx Introduction) (cp. Bretherton, Mannin 2013: Introduction)

A similar approach in explaining the emerging of the Europeanisation concept can be found in Caporaso 2007. In his article “The Three Worlds of Regional Integration Theory” the author explains the emerging of the concept of Europeanisation as the result of dissatisfaction to describe the new developments of integration with already existing integration theories and explains this approach by dividing European integration into stages. The first stage of integration is described as a “bottom-up” approach, where member states transfer certain powers to the European, supranational level. At this early stage of European integration, integration theories that were used in the context of international relations until then were applied to the new and unique organisation, mainly aiming at explaining the phenomenon of transferring powers to international institutions. The developments of the 1980s are described as the second stage of European integration, where the institutionalisation of many policy areas had become natural and member states became accustomed to the institutional processes. Moreover, until then a considerable amount of European acts was passed and transposed into national law and member states also experienced the power of the European Court of Justice. To some extent the advancing integration and institutionalisation developed a life of their own. In many areas integration was progressing as a result of the so-called spillover-mechanism – “a situation, in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action and so forth.” (Lindberg 1963:10 cited in Pollack, Slominski 2012:56) The formation of supranational structures in the European Community involving the ability of self-regulation also required a change in regional integration theories. The initial attempt to describe the new changes involved the use of existing theories, such as functionalism or intergovernmentalism, where old patterns of analysis were used for describing the European integration process as the transfer of authority to an international

institution. It has become clear however that the EU “had arrived as a quasi-autonomous level of analysis.” (Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:26) This new approach involved the analysis of “cross-level relationships – not only from the member states to the EU, but also from the centres of the EU back to the member states,” which “is associated with the Europeanization focus” (Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:26). (cp. Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:23ff)

In his approach Mannin takes the unique “supranational structure of the EU, with its intrusive, institutionalized characteristics” (Mannin in Bretherton, Mannin 2013:3) as a starting point to explain the emergence of a new category of political science experts, in addition to country experts, international relations experts and regional studies scholars, namely the Europeanists – “whose mission is to explain the complex inner workings of the EU” (Mannin in Bretherton, Mannin 2013:3) and the concept of Europeanisation as their tool. The author also provides some background concepts of “Europeanisation” and describes some “past Europeanizations” throughout history that have made a contribution to the formation of a European identity, such as e.g. the “era of the Enlightenment, and the political and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”, [...] that “are viewed as providing the foundational values and practices of Europeanization today” (Mannin in Bretherton, Mannin 2013:5) although it “contained a set of ideas that at once produced the best of European values and the worst” (2013:6). According to Mannin, the so-called “EU-ization” is consequently also one (the current) period of Europeanisation. Furthermore, Europeanisation is closely linked to the term Europeanism, defined as expressing “the accumulated cultural and historical values of Europe’s civilizations” (2013:9). In this connection “Europeanization may be seen in the most general terms as the process(es) that distribute those values [...]”. (2013:9)

The distinction between integration and Europeanisation is also considered to be an important aspect, as integration basically refers to the distribution of powers. In fact, “Europeanization is the *product* of integration; it examines the process and results of integration”. (Mannin in Bretherton, Mannin 2013:10) If we apply this statement to the area of education policy, where the authority remains with the member states and thus there is no integration with regard to the definition of the distribution of powers; the task of Europeanisation would be to analyse the processes of cooperation between member states and results in form of concrete measures despite the lack of integration in this area. Apart

from aspects that might immediately come to ones mind, such as financial incentives in form of grants and financial benefits in the framework of e.g. European education programmes, the aspects described in the next paragraph might also play an important role with regard to the willingness and ability to produce results and introduce changes at national level.

When we look at the effects of integration on domestic structures, the diversity of political and organisational systems of the different member states plays an important role, especially when looking at the EU as a multi-level polity. In the context of integration it can be assumed that adjustment pressure exists. However this pressure does not automatically lead to adjustment due to the different prevalent systems and different levels of progress in the respective member states. Europeanisation also deals with this issue by looking at the different responses to European integration. Caporaso uses a three-step model¹ to capture this process comprising the stages integration, fit/misfit and mediating factors. The responses to integration (e.g. in form of legal acts) depend very much on the degree to which the respective legal act fits with the already existing national law. Despite the pressure to adapt, one country might be able to adapt more easily, if there is a good fit between EU- and national law or in the case of education policy between EU and national targets and strategies. On the other hand other countries could face difficulties in living up to adjusting expectations due to greater gaps between national and targeted EU law or strategies. Therefore, pressure and national results always have to be seen in connection with the fit or misfit question. In case of a good fit there is little adaptational pressure, because the changes do not require great effort, and the other way round. The third step of the model – mediating factors (e.g. formal and informal institutions, veto groups, etc.) also play a particularly important role in case of high adaptational pressure, since they can influence the responses and changes to a great extent. (cp. Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:23-34)

These aspects provide a valuable basis for the following chapters of this paper, especially when looking at Austrian cooperation in the area of education at EU level. Since Austria is generally considered to be the “model student” with regard to compliance with EU

¹ This model was adapted from Risse, T., Cowles, M. G., & Caporaso, J. (2001). Europeanization and domestic change: Introduction. *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and domestic change*, 1-20. (cp. Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:28)

strategies, it could be examined, if this can be attributed to the low adaptational pressure in the respective policy areas – in this case education policy.

It is worth mentioning that the consulted literature on Europeanisation also identifies the problem of interpretation with regard to changes in domestic politics, when it comes to assessing, if such changes occurred as a result of European or global effects. In view of global pressure and the need to stay competitive at a global level, the EU has developed certain strategies, such as the currently valid Europe 2020 Strategy, which also includes the area of education. Although the source of motivation with respect to domestic changes might not always be answered with exact certainty, Mannin argues not to “view both concepts as competing explanations of change in domestic politics” as “the EU is part of globalization as well as a separate entity resisting some of its problematic consequences” (Mannin in Bretherton, Mannin 2013:10).

2.2 Definition chosen for the thesis

For the purpose of this thesis the comprehensive set of definitions and broad spectrum of approaches is narrowed down, so that reference can be made at a later stage. The approach chosen in this respect is one by Radaelli from his article “Europeanisation: Solution or problem?” from 2004. According to Radaelli, Europeanisation focuses on the domestic consequences of the process of European integration and the adaptation to Europe. The definition suggested by Radaelli reads as follows:

“Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.” (Radaelli 2004:3)

and further

“Europeanisation takes place when: The EU becomes a cognitive and normative frame, and provides orientation to the logics of meaning and action. There is a process of change, either in response to EU pressure or as usage of Europe.” (Radaelli 2004:11)

This definition was chosen for the thesis, because Europeanisation is seen as an interactive process, where domestic actors can “draw of Europe as resource without specific pressure from Brussels” (Radaelli 2004:4).

In order to analyse and measure the power of Europeanisation Radaelli draws on mechanisms, which he links to governance. The discussed governance modes are bargaining, hierarchy and facilitated coordination. The last one is of particular interest for this thesis, since education policy in a EU context is based on cooperation, which is facilitated by the EU through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that will be discussed in the further course. Radaelli describes facilitated coordination as a forum for discussion and a platform for policy transfer that is provided by the EU. The Open Method of Coordination as one form of facilitated cooperation does not result in legislation, but rather “produces opportunities for learning – the default explanation of Europeanisation for this mode” (Radaelli 2004:13)”.

It is however difficult to assess, which policy changes at national level actually result from pressure in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination and would not have occurred anyway in the domestic politics system. Moreover, the author stresses that the potential of the OMC “in terms of Europeanisation is limited when domestic coalitions for reforms are weak, or the stakeholders do not engage creatively with the imported institutional models.” (Radaelli 2004:13). This might not be the case in Austria, because, as already mentioned, Austria was always considered to be a model student in this respect. An insight into this perception will be given at a later stage of the thesis, where the participation of Austria in various programmes is presented.

2.3 Selected approach to measure the transformation of education policy

One approach, in the framework of which changes in the area of education policy are analysed and it is measured, how international organisations may influence national

education systems is presented by Martens, Nagel, Windzio and Weymann (2010). In their publication the authors portray the growing role of international organisations, such as the EU and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on national education systems by showing, how education policy has become more and more institutionalised over time as a result of activities of international organisations. They argue that “education policy no longer seems to be a domestic area in which government activity, supervision, and control are particularly strong and (almost) exclusive, rather these internationalization processes exert influence on national education systems” (2010:3). This view is exemplified in a theoretical part as well as in comparative county case studies with a focus on the PISA Study (Programme for International Student Assessment) and the Bologna Process. Moreover, the authors argue that although member states initialised certain processes, such as the Bologna Process and thus brought education policy to the European level, the respective international organisations later developed “institutional dynamics” by starting to develop own agendas. In the case of the Bologna process the authors argue that “countries were not aware that action at the European level would weaken government influence [...]” (2010:7) The topic is approached on the basis of policy analysis, where the dimensions of policy, politics and polity are distinguished in order to show that international initiatives (e.g. the Bologna Process) can transfer education policy to all three dimensions. The ultimate or even intended result is considered to be convergence, because the Bologna Process or other internationalisation processes aim at creating one common model. (cp. 2010:3-10)

In order to analyse the effects of the international instruments that were mentioned above, five governance instruments of international institutions, namely norm setting, opinion formation, financial means, coordinative activities and consulting services are named. With regard to the first category – norm setting – the authors argue that normative pressure is exerted on national politics, when international organisations set standards that are periodically measured and evaluated. Referring to the second category – opinion formation – international organisations may influence or trigger political debates at national level by issuing publications and thus spreading their values and goals. The coordinative tasks of e.g. the EU are also considered to be an important factor in this respect, because they help to “shape the organizational process” (2010:11). Although there is no possibility for international organisations to legislate in the area of education, they use instruments, such as e.g. country reports or peer reviews to make policy recommendations. In the case of the

Bologna Process the authors also mention the “so-called Bologna Promoters [that] have been appointed to promote higher education reforms on an institutional level” (2010:12). In order to explain the various reactions to initiatives of international organisations the authors also take into consideration national transformation capacities including veto players and veto points that may mediate strategies of international organisations. National ministers are mentioned as the most important veto players, because they are directly involved in the decision making process. Another aspect in this connection are the “guiding principles of education as ideational modifiers” (2010:14), which could be e.g. the “basic understanding about the significance of education as a public good” (2010:15) and can influence a state’s capacity for change.

Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. analyse the influence of international organisations on national policymaking on the basis of a quantitative approach. In the process of their analysis they established the following three hypotheses. First, they argue that countries, which are e.g. members of international organisations and are therefore close to their governing system, such as member states of the EU, are generally more likely to adapt international policies. The second hypothesis implies that countries are less likely to adopt international policies, if they have many veto players. The third hypothesis states that “the welfare system of a country should impact on education policy change [...]”. (Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. 2010:229). (cp. Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. 2010:227 ff)

The difficulty of assessing the motives and triggering factors of political change at national level, as described in the chapter on Europeanisation, is also reflected in the description of different national responses to international policies by Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. 2010. On the one hand there is the possibility that “a welfare and education system that already embodies many of the internationally promoted policy goals might be more likely to adapt to new policy advice [...]” (2010:229). This would also correspond to the fit and misfit approach mentioned in the Europeanisation section. On the other hand, countries with greater gaps with respect to the internationally set targets “might be [...] particularly eager for policy change” (2010:229).

2.3.1 Impact assessment

In order to measure the influence of international organisations on national policymaking in the area of education Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio use four sets of independent theoretical variables. The first one is IO governance (international organisations governance), where membership of states in international organisations as well as its duration is measured. In case of the influence of the EU on its member states the membership of countries in the Bologna Process is considered to serve “as a proxy for the extent to which a country is linked to European education policy” (Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. 2010:230). In this connection information on financial transfers from the EU is analysed. The authors assume that net receivers are less autonomous with respect to policymaking in the area of education and are thus more closely linked to the goals set by the EU. The second theoretical variable refers to national transformation capacities. Here, two aspects, namely the number of veto options as well as the classification of welfare regimes are taken into account. With respect to the classification of welfare regimes, which is divided into six different types, Austria is counted to the Social Democratic type together with e.g. Denmark, Finland or Sweden. This type of welfare regime is characterised by the idea that the state “protects individuals from market risk” (2010:231) e.g. in contrast to the liberal type that can be found e.g. in England and which is characterised by a restraint state. The third variable deals with alternative explanations and analyses factors, such as e.g. the political majority in parliament. In this model education policy change constitutes the dependent variable and is analysed by means of various indicators with regard to policy outputs and outcomes. Convergence and divergence is further analysed by looking at quantitative aspects like the pupil-teacher ratio or hours taught per year. (cp. Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. 2010:230ff)

The described results of the study carried out by Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio show some trends with respect to changes of selected indicators when countries are grouped with regard to their membership in international organisations and their membership duration. However, the authors also state that in some areas the changes are simply “too weak to be interpreted” (2010:236). Moreover, some assumptions could not be underlined by the results of the conducted study, see p. 252: “Regarding our hypotheses formulated in the conceptual section [...] evidence of empirical results is rather mixed.” (cp. 2010:237ff).

These not always clear, and sometimes ambiguous results presented by Jakobi, Teltemann and Windzio in Martens et al. underline the difficulty to measure the impact of the EU on national education policies, as already discussed in the section on Europeanisation. The reason, why this approach was presented in a very detailed way, is to portray various hypotheses and means of analysis in order to show the possibilities and impossibilities of the present Master Thesis.

3 The educational landscape in Austria

The following overview of the educational landscape in Austria shall serve as an orientation for further reference, which is made e.g. in EU documents or country specific recommendations.

The Austrian education system can be divided into the following levels²:

Elementary Level: The elementary level includes pre-school education for children, who are old enough to attend school, but are not yet ready due to various reasons as well as crèches, kindergartens, after-school care facilities and children's groups. (http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

Primary Level: Compulsory education starts at the age of six at primary school level, which includes integrative education in the framework of regular primary schools as well as special needs schools. The primary level covers four years of education, which is a quite early tracking compared to other EU member states.

Secondary Level I: The secondary level I lasts for another four years and covers the grades 5-8. After the previously described four years of primary education the pupils have to chose between several school forms or rather are classified in accordance with their

² The information on education levels of the National Education Report 2012 slightly differs from information provided by the Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD), whose national coordinating point is responsible for the National Qualifications Framework. Due to the up-to-dateness of the internet source, the information of the OeAD was chosen.

education results, since there are different admission requirements based on grades of the fourth grade of the primary level. The possibilities include:

- Primary school upper cycle³
- Lower secondary school⁴
- New secondary school⁵
- Academic secondary school lower level
- Special needs schools and inclusive education

(http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

Secondary Level II: Compulsory education in Austria lasts for nine years. The last year of compulsory education can be completed in one of the following school forms:

- Polytechnical schools preparing pupils for an apprenticeship or job
- Vocational schools with apprenticeships
- Vocational secondary schools
- Vocational colleges
- Upper level of grammar schools (higher secondary schools of general education)
- Vocational preparatory year
- Integrative vocational education

(http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

Post-secondary Level: This level refers to non-tertiary education, such as the 4th and 5th forms of vocational colleges, educational institutions for nurses and health professions, other continuing education as well as matriculation examinations.

(http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

³ In comparison to the other forms this school type is very rare with only 16 locations in Austria. (<https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/abs.html> as of 16 July 2014)

⁴ Until 2015/2016 all lower secondary schools should be transformed into new secondary schools. (<https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/bw/nms/index.html> as of 16 July 2014)

⁵ The new secondary school type has been a regular school type since 1 September 2012. (<https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/bw/nms/index.html> as of 16 July 2014)

Non-university Tertiary Level: This level refers to schools for mastercraftsmen, foremen and construction trades after the completion of a general or vocational education.

(http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

Tertiary Level: This level refers to studies at universities or university colleges.

(http://www.oead.at/welcome_to_austria/education_research/the_austrian_education_system/EN/ as of 16 July 2014)

According to the National Education Report of 2012⁶, which is prepared by the federal institute for educational research, innovation and development of the Austrian school sector (BIFIE), international experiences in the area of education and especially the EU education cooperation have a significant effect on Austria's education policy as well as planned reform projects. (cp. BIFIE 2012: Introduction)

4 EU education cooperation – EU education policy

The term “EU education policy” might be somehow misleading, because the EU only coordinates, supports and supplements its member states' national education policies and a common EU education policy in the narrower sense does not exist due to the disability of the EU to legislate in this field. Nevertheless, this term is widely used and was also used in this Master Thesis to describe all cooperation-, support- and supplementing activities in connection with the EU's values and goals in this respect. Despite the lack of an exact definition, the term can be also found in the literature that was consulted in the course of the research for this thesis. It is e.g. used in the Austrian National Report on Education of 2012 and in Martens et al. (2010). For the purpose of this paper, the term EU education policy is used synonymously with the term EU education cooperation.

⁶ The last Austrian National Education Report of 2012 was prepared under the former education minister Claudia Schmied, who ran the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture until 2013. In the meantime the ministry was renamed to Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and is headed by Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek. (cp. Nationaler Bildungsbericht 2012; <https://www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/index.html> as of 16 July 2014)

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (in BIFIE 2012) describes the emergence of a European education policy as a special case of internationalisation efforts, but also as an important element of the European integration process. In this connection, national education as well as degrees are increasingly adjusted and tailored to international requirements, mostly with the help of EU education programmes that cover all levels of education. European education policy not only constitutes an important factor for the internationalisation of the Austrian education system; it also gives impulses and backs up national reform plans. Although a coordination of contents by the EU is not envisaged by the Treaty provisions, because it would interfere with the member states' exclusive authority in this area as well as the principle of subsidiarity⁷, common European contents are transported in an indirect way. This may involve the integration of European content into EU education programmes or the development of new project content. In addition, the European dimension in the area of education is strengthened by the establishment of institutions and bodies at national level, which coordinate EU activities. The aims of developing a European dimension in the area of education reach from personal benefits for participants in education programmes, such as e.g. gaining intercultural competences to more abstract objectives, such as the development of a European identity. All in all it can be said that intergovernmental coordination, political commitments and strategies set the basis for a EU education policy. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012)

With regard to its participation in the context of EU education policy Austria is described as strongly committed since the beginnings. This is also backed by the fact that Austria is participating in almost all working groups in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination. Due to its strong involvement Austria is also often considered a role model at European level. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012)

4.1 Legal basis of EU education cooperation

Depending on whether competences have been transferred to the EU by the member states or not, the EU may either adopt legally binding acts and legislative harmonisation rules or

⁷The principle of subsidiarity refers to competences at European, national and local level, which are shared between the EU and its member states. According to this principle, the EU shall only intervene in an area of shared competence, if it can act more effectively than the member state in order to avoid over-regulation by the EU. (http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/lisbon_treaty/ai0017_en.htm as of 14 July 2014)

is not allowed to legislate in a respective policy area: “Under the principle of conferral, the Union shall act only within the limits of the competences conferred upon it by the Member States in the Treaties to attain the objectives set out therein.” (Treaty on European Union, Title I, Art 5 (2))

The exact distribution of competences is codified in the Lisbon Treaty and more precisely in the Treaty on European Union. According to the Treaty, the Union may either have exclusive competences, such as e.g. with regard to the customs union or the monetary policy for the member states whose currency is the euro; shared competences, e.g. referring to the internal market, environment or consumer protection and supporting competences, which include, among others, the area of education, vocational training, youth and sport, where member states opted not to confer powers to the EU. “In accordance with Article 5, competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the Member States.” (Treaty on European Union, Title I, Common Provisions, Art 4 (1))

Despite the fact that the EU must not adopt legislative harmonisation rules where it only has supporting competences, it may “support, co-ordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States”. (Piris 2010:75) In the preamble of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) the values and goals of the EU with respect to education are specified as follows:

“[...] DETERMINED to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating [...]” (TFEU Preamble)

Moreover the exact competences in the framework of the EU’s coordination-, supporting- and supplementing function are defined. These competences include, among other things, the definition and implementation of programmes in the area of research, technological development and space. (TFEU Part 1, Title I, Art 4 (3)) Moreover, the EU committed itself to encouraging cooperation between member states with the aim to foster quality education. (TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165) In case national education policies are supported or supplemented by EU activities, the TFEU states that member states shall not be prevented from exercising their own competences (Title I, Art 4 (3)). Furthermore “the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and [...] cultural and

linguistic diversity” (TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165) as well as “requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health” (TFEU Part 1, Title II, Art 9) must be respected.

The following list, which can be found in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, includes the EU’s aims in the area of education that shall be achieved with the help of various instruments, such as education programmes, networks, etc. that will be later described in detail. As will be shown in the next chapter’s historical overview of EU education policy, very similar goals were already mentioned in the beginning of education cooperation at European level and have not lost their relevance until today.

“Union action shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States,
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study,
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments,
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States,
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe, [...]” (TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165)

4.2 Historical overview of EU education cooperation

The historical overview provided in this chapter aims at giving an outline of ideas and developments in connection with education cooperation at European level. It shows quite well that, although member states were not willing to confer powers in the area of education to the Union, they were always interested in cooperation in this sphere and willing to make voluntary commitments. The present overview is not intended to be exhaustive, since not all official documents and Treaty provisions concerning education were listed. The focus was rather placed on events and documents that can be considered

milestones of education cooperation and illustrate the gradual developments and institutionalisation in this policy area that lies outside of the EU's sphere of competence.

Although EU education policy has only cooperation character and authority in this sphere is left with the member states, the idea of a European Union and before that of the European Communities has always been very strongly linked to a perception of a cultural unity, which also entails the sphere of education in order to promote common values. The term "integration tendencies" (translation from German) used by Clemens et al. (2008:275) that have evolved partly under political influence of European institutions and partly independently before the institutions were established, describes quite well the considerable development of the voluntary cooperation process in the area of education despite the lack of the Union's competence in this field. (cp. Clemens et al. 2008:175)

4.2.1 Early developments – cooperation with the Council of Europe

EU education policy has always been closely linked to the Council of Europe, an organisation outside of the EU system with a focus on the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe that has been established in 1949 and now comprises 47 member states (cp. <http://hub.coe.int/> as of 2 July 2014). Since not all members of the Council of Europe are members of the EU, the Union's cooperation in the area of education policy goes beyond its frontiers, also enabling cooperation projects with third countries. A very prominent example is the Bologna Process that was initiated in the framework of the Council of Europe and was later incorporated into the system of the European Union. The EU's commitment to cooperate with the Council of Europe can be also found in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: "The Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of education and sport, in particular the Council of Europe." (TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165)

An important reason for the close cooperation of the EU and the Council of Europe in this policy area is the fact that the Council of Europe has been focusing on the cultural dimension, including social and education policy since its beginnings, which makes it a very valuable, experienced partner. One of the milestones in this respect was the European

Cultural Convention of 1954 in which the signatory countries commit themselves to cooperate in the areas of culture and education and which formed the basis for further work in this area. In the convention, whose aims were quite similar to those of the EU today, the focus was placed on the study of European languages, history and culture. Those aims should be achieved and facilitated through e.g. “consultation between the contracting parties in promoting cultural activities of European interest, facilitating the movement and exchange of persons”, etc. (Council of Europe. (1954) European Cultural Convention. Art 3 and 4) With time the mutual recognition of qualifications also became a key issue of the Council of Europe and later the Union – something that has remained relevant until today and where still some obstacles have to be removed.

In the 1950s, when the European Coal and Steel Community was established with the mere focus on economic cooperation, the interests of the two organisations were quite far apart. However, with a deeper European integration, the cooperation between the two grew as well. In the first Treaties references to education were rather rare, covering only vocational training. “[...] the Commission shall have the task of promoting close co-operation between Member States in the social field, particularly in matters relating to [...] basic and advanced vocational training [...] (Treaty of Rome 1957, Art 118) In this connection it is also referred to “implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market” (Treaty of Rome 1957, Art 128) as well as to a fund for vocational retraining (Art 125).

4.2.2 Developments since the 1970s

Significant development with regard to the education systems as such occurred not until the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam. Prior to that, ministers of education of the European Community members met in the Council in 1971 in order to discuss the possibility of a deeper cooperation in the area of education at Community level. Worth mentioning here is also the fact that these deliberations took place in the light of student protests and general changes in the social and economic sphere. Before that there have already been expressions of interest at The Hague in 1969. In general, there was a strong endeavour on the side of heads of state and governments to create a common education

policy at Community level, among others to strengthen a European consciousness. For the first time education was considered to be an important element of European integration. This new approach is also reflected in the Janne-report of 1973 “For a Community policy on education”, which should examine the possibility of a common education policy at Community level: (cp. Horn 2007:21f)

[...] our mission constitutes only one stage in a process which sooner or later must take the form of a Community policy – more or less broad and active – in the field of education. (Janne 1973:9)

However, the experts entrusted with this kind of feasibility study concluded that the possibilities in this regard were very limited. Nevertheless the Janne-report of 1973 marks an important stage of developments in and approach to EU education policy. (cp. Horn 2007:22)

Commitments with regard to education cooperation, the facilitation of access to education within the European Communities, information exchange between national education systems as well as the mutual recognition of qualifications and the exchange of students, lecturers and researchers were first undertaken in 1974 at the second meeting of education ministers in the Council. The respective action programme for the achievement of the goals followed in 1976. (cp. Clemens et al. 2008:279ff)

The above mentioned action programme, which was published in the framework of a resolution by the Council and of ministers of education can be considered as a milestone in EU education policy, as it not only comprises expressions of interest (“[...] reaffirming their desire to achieve European cooperation in education, [...] aware of the contributions such cooperation can make to the development of the Community [...]”), but also very concrete measures, including the establishment of an Education Committee, which should coordinate and oversee the implementation of the action programme. The creation of the Education Committee marks an important step in this development, because, although only on a cooperation basis, education policy was institutionalised and became an integral part of the system of the European Communities. To be more precise, it was awarded the task to prepare the proceedings of the Council and of the ministers of education meeting with the Council and the Commission was required to “act in agreement” with the Committee in

order to implement the respective measures. Moreover, it was agreed to hold periodical meetings “to follow the implementation of the action programme, to establish future guidelines, and to compare their policies” (Art III). The action programme itself puts a great focus on language learning also providing measures with regard to the exchange of information and experience. Furthermore, the member states commit themselves to promoting closer relations between education systems in Europe including meetings and “study visits for local, regional and national administrators of schools and institutions of higher education” (Art IV, 4). Further measures include, among others, exchanges for teachers and pupils, education activities with a European content, documentation and statistics on education, the establishment of an information network, the extension of scholarships as well as a report on the academic recognition of diplomas. Another issue that was stressed in the resolution was the achievement of equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education as an “essential aim of the education policies [...] in order to achieve equality of opportunities in society”. (Art IV, 20) (cp. Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education 1976)

The new approach went hand in hand with some other new developments, such as the creation of a directorate general responsible for education and research in the Commission in 1973, which developed in the DG for Education and Culture as we know it today. Apart from that the CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) was established by the European Council in 1975, which exists until today and contributes to the promotion of lifelong learning in Europe. Moreover, the education information network “Eurydice” was founded in 1980 on the Commission’s initiative, which also operates until today. With the end of the 1980s common education programmes, which will be covered at a later stage of this thesis, were added to the EU education cooperation portfolio. (cp. Horn 2007:22ff)

Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 education was granted a more prominent role in the Treaties of the European Communities and later the European Union. Maastricht gave room to extensive commitments with regard to cooperation between member states in education aiming at a development of quality education across Europe. The commitments and measures introduced in the Council Resolution of 1976 were now anchored in the Treaty of Maastricht as well as in the following Treaties. (cp. Treaty of Maastricht, Title VIII, Chapter 3 Art 126)

4.2.3 The Bologna Process

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 and the subsequent so-called Bologna Process can be considered a milestone in the history of EU education cooperation as well, although they were initialised outside of the Union's system. The Bologna Process goes back to an idea of four education ministers from France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy, who considered a fragmented, non-uniform sector of higher education to be out-dated and aimed at establishing a European higher education area in order to make European higher education more competitive and more attractive. For this purpose they signed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, whose aims were confirmed by 30 countries one year later in the Bologna Declaration. Apart from strengthening the competitiveness of European higher education, the stakeholders agreed upon the promotion of mobility and employability of students through the introduction of a degree system with transparent programmes and academic degrees, which gradually developed into the current Bachelor- and Master degree system. The Bologna Process is not based on binding agreements; therefore the implementation of goals can be described as a voluntary harmonisation process. In the course of further conferences at ministerial level the goals of the Bologna Declaration were extended and specified. With the official establishment of a European higher education area in 2010 in the framework of ministerial conferences in Budapest and Vienna the initial plan defined in the Bologna Declaration was achieved, although the planned harmonisation with regard to e.g. the recognition of foreign degrees developed at different paces in the participating European countries. In the new decade since the establishment of a European higher education area the priorities included, among other things, the following areas: The social dimension, life-long learning, the promotion of employability, the connection of education, research and innovation, mobility, the improvement of data collection, etc. Although the Bologna Process was initiated outside of the EU system, over time the EU has incorporated the goals into its agenda of education policy and its following strategies, starting with the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. (cp. Bologna Declaration 1999; <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=3> as of 27 June 2014)

4.2.4 The Lisbon Strategy

In view of the economic and financial crisis entailing high unemployment levels across Europe as well as the challenges posed by globalisation, the European Council agreed upon new strategic goals in 2000 in order “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, I (5)). Aware of the difficult economic situation of the years to come, the strategy also focused on education, aiming at education opportunities tailored to different target groups. Local learning centres, the promotion of new basic skills, in particular in the information technologies, and increased transparency of qualifications were the three main components of the new approach. Apart from the promotion of mobility and transparency in the recognition of qualifications, the goals included, among others, an increase in investment in human resources; higher enrolment of 18 to 24 year olds in further education; learning partnerships between e.g. schools and firms; lifelong learning in the areas of IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills. Moreover, a Common European format for curricula vitae (Europass) should be developed. (cp. Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, I (25, 26)) The assessment of the implementation of goals, which were defined in the Lisbon Strategy showed that the goals, not only in the area of education, but also in all other areas, were too ambitious and overcharged many member states. This fact was taken into consideration in the strategy for the next decade – the Europe 2020 Strategy that will be covered in one of the following chapters on Austria’s participation in the EU’s education framework.

4.2.5 The Copenhagen Process

Similar to the Bologna process in the area of higher education the Copenhagen process aims at improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET). Activities carried out in the framework of the Copenhagen process are based on intergovernmental priority setting and a periodical review process as well. (cp. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/vocational_training/ef0018_en.htm as of 15 July 2014) In the declaration of European ministers of vocational education and training and the European Commission of 2002 the stakeholders agree upon

enhanced European cooperation in this area in view of the economic and social development of the last decade as well as challenges and opportunities arising from the enlargement of the EU. With regard to the coordination of the Copenhagen process the declaration refers to the commitments of the Bologna declaration and reaffirms the member states objective to contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals (and now the Europe 2020 goals). Voluntary cooperation in the VET area is aimed at being increased through four main priorities. First, the European dimension in the area of vocational education and training should be strengthened by facilitating mobility and the development of inter-institutional cooperation as well as cross-border activities. By doing so the European VET area should stay globally competitive. The second priority involves the promotion of transparency, information and guidance by e.g. integrating already existing transparency tools, such as the Europass documents or the Common European framework of reference for languages into the vocational education and training. In connection with this priority, institutions and policies should be strengthened in order to facilitate the mobility of citizens. The next priority concerns the recognition of competences and qualifications, including investigations regarding the question, how transparency can be promoted by e.g. the development of reference levels or a credit transfer system. A focus was also placed on the development of common principles to validate non-formal learning. The last priority was that of quality assurance, including the exchange of best practices as well as teacher training. In addition to the EU member states also EFTA⁸-EEA⁹ countries, candidate countries as well as social partners should be integrated into the cooperation process. Moreover, all cooperation activities should be carried out in the context of lifelong learning. (cp. European Commission, European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training 2002)

In 2004 the Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) reaffirmed the objectives of the Copenhagen declaration of 2002 and underlined the need to further strengthen the field of VET at European and national level in view of the changes on the labour market. The communiqué refers to an interim report, which presented first results of the Copenhagen

⁸ Countries of the European Free Trade Association include Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (<http://www.efta.int/> as of 15 July 2014)

⁹ The European Economic Area (EEA) was established in 1994 and includes the EU member states as well as the three EFTA-EEA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway forming a single market. (<http://www.efta.int/eea/eea-agreement> as of 15 July 2014)

process and called for the development of European common references and principles in form of a European qualification framework for the area of VET, but also for secondary and higher education. Moreover, a credit transfer system for the area of VET – the ECVET – should be developed based on the ECTS¹⁰ credit system in higher education. (cp. Maastricht Communiqué 2004) Besides, the Maastricht Communiqué includes specific priorities for member states in the area of vocational education and training for the first time that should be taken into consideration at national level. These priorities comprise, among others, reforming and developing national VET systems, the possibility to draw financial support from European funds as well as the establishment of VET frameworks in order to ensure transparency.

(cp.http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/vocational_training/ef0018_en.htm as of 15 July 2014)

Following the Maastricht Communiqué further communiqués on vocational education and training were published in two-year intervals (Helsinki 2006, Bordeaux 2008, Bruges 2010) until the adoption of the strategic framework for education and training ET2020 in 2010.

(cp.http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/vocational_training/ef0018_en.htm as of 15 July 2014)

4.3 The Open Method of Coordination

As already covered in the previous part of this paper, EU education policy is based on cooperation between member states. Since the EU member states have not conferred powers in the area of education to the EU, the Union has no authority to legislate in this field. The Union may however provide support and coordinate cooperation, including the implementation of incentive measures in the form of funds and cooperation programmes. Despite the fact that the EU may not produce any legal acts in this policy area, it saw the need to provide an instrument that would serve as a framework for cooperation. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which was considered to be the appropriate tool in this case, was first introduced and defined by the European Council in the course of the Lisbon

¹⁰ „The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver study programmes and award higher education qualifications.” (http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm as of 15 July 2014)

Strategy of 2000 aiming at improving competitiveness on a global level. Since then this new form of governance was gradually applied to other policy areas, such as employment policy, social policy and education policy. The OMC is however also applied in policy areas, where authority was conferred to the Union, since it can be generally used on a case-to-case basis. The advantage of this new form of governance lies in its generally non-binding nature, where member states that fear the influence of the EU in some policy areas may voluntarily cooperate with other members outside the Community method. (cp. Weidenfeld 2013: 175f)

Apart from the Lisbon Strategy the need for new forms of governance outside the Community method was also addressed in a White Paper by the European Commission. The Commission White Paper of 2001 on European Governance deals with challenges of the European Union and introduces respective proposals for change, among others, the need to renew the Community method. In this respect the OMC is described as a means to complement and reinforce Community action in some areas such as education, where it “adds value at a European level where there is little scope for legislative solutions [...] by for example [...] defining future objectives for national education systems”. (Commission White Paper 2001:18) The OMC is often compared to or even defined as soft law. There are however some differences between these forms as described by Pollak and Slominski. In comparison to classical soft law (communications, guidelines, recommendations, decisions on guidelines) which is generally not legally binding, but may have legal implications and is resolved by the Commission, the OMC is a mere intergovernmental process with a non-legally binding character. Soft law may however be adopted in the framework of the OMC. Moreover, the OMC is intended to provide a framework for a longer policy process, whereas soft law is transported by one unique act. (cp. Pollack, Slominski 2012:160)

In practice the OMC involves four stages that enable the member states to identify best practices through networking and the exchange of information and incorporate them into their national systems on a voluntary basis. The first stage involves the setting of guidelines and timetables, which may include short, medium and long-term goals. Next the member states establish qualitative indicators and benchmarks that enable them to measure and compare progress. As already mentioned, the OMC may involve soft law that is translated into the national education policies in the third stage by adopting appropriate

measures. In the fourth stage the results are analysed and evaluated through periodic monitoring. Despite the non-legally binding nature of the OMC and hence the inability to impose e.g. sanctions, peer pressure is often mentioned as a driving force in this respect. (cp. Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, I (37)) However, this governance mode also allows flexibility for member states with respect to the adjustment of objectives as well as to the ways in which these objectives should be met. The great flexibility on the one hand and peer pressure and strict monitoring on the other hand form the basis for an ambivalent character of the Open Method of Coordination. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012)

Despite the broad range of stakeholders in this soft-governance process, commitments in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination can be described as a top-down process in comparison to a “bottom-up Europeanisation” (translated from Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:2), which takes place in the context of EU education programmes with the participation of students, teachers, experts, etc. The OMC also served as a good instrument to balance out the possible conflict situations resulting from an intensification of EU efforts in the area of education policy that could be observed in the past decade. During this period coordination in the framework of the OMC took place in context of the Bologna Process for the area of higher education and the Copenhagen process for vocational training. In 2010 these processes were integrated into the strategic framework for education and training - the ET2020, which covers all levels of education. (see chapter on Austria’s education cooperation with the EU) (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:6) As regards the different levels of education, it has to be mentioned that the area of school education is subject to the smallest range of cooperation in comparison to higher education and vocational training, because school education has been in the focus of EU coordination for the shortest period of time and the protection of national interest in this education sector always played an important role in connection with the preservation of cultural identities. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012)

4.4 EU bodies and their competences in the area of education

“In order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article:

— the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States,

— the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.”

(TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165)

In the framework of the European Semester, which will be presented in the next chapter on Austria’s education co-operation with the EU, the EU institutions have the following tasks: The Commission publishes an Annual Growth Survey as well as country specific policy recommendations. It also monitors the situation in the member states based on set targets. The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament give their opinion on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey published by the Commission. In this process the Council is also responsible for monitoring and peer review as well as for discussing the implementation of national reform programmes in the member states. Apart from preparing political guidelines, The European Council assesses progress in the member states and endorses the country-specific recommendations, which were issued by the Commission. (cp. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/who-does-what/eu-institutions/index_en.htm as of 28 June 2014)

In the context of the strategic framework for education and training (ET 2020), which will be presented in the further course as well, the Council of the European Union identifies challenges and sets strategic objectives for the following ten years. Furthermore, it also sets benchmarks that should serve as references for the member states in specific areas. In the further course the Council invites the European Commission to present additional benchmarks in other areas of education. The Commission is moreover invited to cooperate with and support the member states in achieving the set objectives, examine the progress of the member states and cooperate with the member states to examine how the existing indicators could be improved. (cp. Council of the European Union on the ET2020 2009:6)

5 Austria's education cooperation with the EU

The next chapter deals with Austria's participation in the EU's education cooperation framework. In order to show the broad spectrum of EU activities in this area, the currently applicable instruments and programmes that were introduced in order to achieve the EU's goals as stipulated in TFEU Part 3, Title XII, Art 165 are presented in detail. The aim of this section is to show, how the European Union exercises its coordinating-, supporting- and supplementing competences in the area of education in practice by means of instruments and programmes that were developed on the legal basis of the Lisbon Treaty in order to develop a European dimension in education. The instruments and programmes that will be presented are all closely linked and were developed on the basis of strategies, conclusions and overall goals that will be also described in the following part of the thesis. For the purpose of a better overview of the developments that took place and decisions that were made in the past few years in view of the political situation, the coordinating-, supporting- and supplementing instruments and programmes will be presented in a chronological order referring to their emergence. In order to portray the communication process between Austria and the competent EU institutions several official reports were consulted. The consulted reports, out of which some are direct responses to recommendations that were issued by the EU, clearly show that several changes in the area of education at national level can be attributed to the cooperation process at European level and can be therefore considered to be effects of EU influence in the broader sense.

5.1 Strategic framework for education and training ET 2020

“Policy co-operation among Member States and the EU institutions is based on the “strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020), which is complemented by a number of funding programmes.”

(http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/education_en.htm as of 9 June 2014)

In 2009 the Council of the European Union published its conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, also known as “ET 2020”. This strategic framework is the successor of the first framework for cooperation in education and training at EU-level - the Education and Training 2010 strategy, which was

developed in the context of the Lisbon Strategy. The new framework should serve as a guideline until the year 2020. Since the new Europe 2020 Strategy was presented in 2010, the ET 2020 also referred to the goals of the Lisbon Strategy, however in 2012 the strategic framework was redesigned and adjusted to the new Europe 2020 Strategy. In the ET 2020 the Council emphasises the crucial role of education and training in connection with socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges that the EU has to face in the future.

In view of global competition, the further development of national education and training systems has to be seen from a worldwide perspective. The key word in this strategy is lifelong learning at all education levels with the aim of becoming a world-leading knowledge economy. In order to achieve these goals the following four strategic objectives were set:

- “Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.” (Council of the European Union 2009:3)

When we look at these strategic objectives and compare them with the objectives of older documents that were described in the historical overview of this thesis, it is clear that some topics have been present from the very beginnings of education cooperation at European level. Although it may seem that the objective have not changed over the past decades, they need to be seen in view of the new socio-economic challenges and in particular taking into account the financial- and economic crisis that started in 2007/2008. In this connection the importance of a global perspective with regard to European competitiveness has to be pointed out as well. All in all, the presented aims sound quite familiar. They include, among others, a close synergy with the Bologna process and cross-sectorial cooperation in areas such as employment- or youth policy.

When it comes to the promotion of reforms at national levels by the EU, the following aspects may have a significant influence on national policies, involving e.g. the establishment of new institutions and jobs or even the adjustment of education curricula.

According to the ET 2020 strategy, educational disadvantage should be addressed by increasing the quality of early childhood education and providing so-called second-chance education. In order to achieve these goals, member states could e.g. reduce the number of students in classes or introduce new forms of education. Moreover, the request to make periods of learning abroad the rule rather than the exception implies that countries, where this is not yet the case should secure adequate funding, which may also have an effect on other policy areas. Furthermore, the promotion of various skills like digital competence, learning to learn, cultural awareness and entrepreneurship could result in a change or a new focus in education agendas.

The developments in the member states are periodically monitored and checked against the benchmarks that were set by the EU. Annex I of the strategic framework ET 2020 comprises all reference levels of European average performance that serve as a reference target. In conformity with the EU's competences, the Council does not request the member states to change their national policies, however it makes a clear statement on the expected responses by the members. "[...] Member States are invited to consider, on the basis of national priorities and whilst taking account of changing economic circumstances, how and to what extent they can contribute to the collective achievement of the European benchmarks through national actions." (Council of the European Union 2009:Annex I) Whilst the competences of the member states in the area of education are fully respected by the EU and whilst the Council stresses the voluntary nature of EU education cooperation, it should also "[...] produce clear and visible outcomes which should be presented, reviewed and disseminated [...]" (Council of the European Union 2009:4)

The five benchmarks include an average of at least 15% of adults participating in lifelong learning; the percentage of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should not exceed 15%; the percentage of 30-34 year olds with tertiary education should be at least 40%; the share of early leavers in education and training should be less than 10% and at least 95% of children between four and the age of starting primary education should be enrolled in early childhood education. In the areas of mobility, employability and language learning the Council invites the European Commission to submit proposals for benchmarks by the end of 2010. (Council of the European Union 2009:Annex I)

In the framework of the ET 2020 the Council also invites the member states to identify priorities for a specific work cycle by selecting working areas in which they would like to participate in joint follow-up work. The possible activities that refer to the four strategic goals are listed in Annex II of the Council conclusions. The follow-up work may include areas, such as the European Qualifications Framework, that will be discussed in detail further below, the professional development of teachers and trainers or the “New Skills for New Jobs”-approach that aims at ensuring that planning processes in the area of education meet the skills required on the labour market. Depending on the chosen priority areas within the respective working cycles the member states can cooperate very broadly with respect to the overall strategy or more closely in case they chose the same priority areas. (cp. Council of the European Union 2009:Annex II; 4 (2b)) Cooperation in the priority areas may take place on the basis of proposals by the Commission in cooperation with the member states and may involve e.g. conferences and seminars, peer learning activities or studies and analyses. (p. 4 (2f))

5.2 Europe 2020 Strategy

With the expiration of the Lisbon Strategy in 2010, the European Commission published a new strategy that should provide guidance until the year 2020 – the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This currently applicable strategy was prepared as a response to the economic and financial crisis and sets a focus on tackling challenges, such as high unemployment, debts and pressure on social cohesion that reached a new dimension with the beginning of the crisis.

In order to tackle these challenges by finding ways to exit the crisis and creating new jobs, a coordinated European response was needed. In contrast to the Lisbon strategy the Commission focused on a limited number of key targets. This decision can be attributed to the conclusions that were drawn from the evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy, which showed that the main targets were not reached, because they were very broad and were lacking clear priority setting. (cp. Lisbon Strategy evaluation document from 2010) In this respect the Commission agreed on five targets for 2020 including the areas of employment, research and innovation, climate change and energy, combating poverty and education.

The need for action in these target areas was concretised by the following three priorities that, in a direct or indirect way, can all be linked to the area education:

- “- Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation
- Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy
- Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion” (European Commission 2010: Europe 2020)

The benchmarks that were set in the area of education are similar to those of the strategic framework for education and training ET 2020, namely a share of early school leavers of below 10% and a share of at least 40% of the younger generation with a tertiary degree. Just like the Council of the European Union in the framework of the ET 2020, the Commission also invites the member states to translate the goals and targets into national actions.

In order to give further guidance, the Commission also presented several actions or flagship initiatives that were introduced to underpin the concluded targets. In the area of education two of the seven initiatives, which are intended to take place both at national and at EU-level were presented. The first initiative entitled “Youth on the move” aims at facilitating the entry of young people in the labour market and involves enhancing the attractiveness of Europe’s higher education, among other things through ensuring high quality in education and training and fostering mobility. The second initiative in this connection is the “Agenda for new skills and jobs”, which is closely linked to the concept of lifelong learning, aiming at ensuring a better compatibility between education and training and the actual demand on the labour market. (cp. European Commission 2010)

As the economically and politically challenging situation at the beginning of the new decade required adequate means to tackle these problems, new instruments were introduced or reemphasised by the European Union. At national level member states were encouraged to build national qualification frameworks, which will be covered in the further course, to ensure the transparency of their education systems. At EU-level the establishment of a youth employment framework aiming at the reduction of youth unemployment was announced. All in all the identified targets are all interrelated and the

area of education is closely linked to the economic sphere, as better educational levels have an effect on employability. Moreover, the issue of global competition from developed, but also emerging economies is awarded a very important role in the new strategy. The EU not only aims at asserting its position economy wise on the global market, but also needs to stay competitive in the education sector, because a high level of education forms the basis for innovative, creative solutions on the labour market and is thus closely linked to the economic sphere. This is particularly important in view of the fact that the EU is lacking behind in many areas with regard to education and training in comparison to the United States or Japan, as noticed by the Commission in the Europe 2020 Strategy. (cp. European Commission 2010) “[...] Europe’s employment rates – at 69% on average for those aged 20-64 – are still significantly lower than in other parts of the world.” (European Commission 2010:9); “[...] only two European universities are in the world’s top 20.” (European Commission 2010:14)

As to the monitoring process regarding the progress made in the member states, the EU has retained the principal instruments of the Lisbon Strategy including e.g. guidelines, country specific recommendations and annual progress reports by the EU institutions as well as country reporting, e.g. in form of national reform programmes by the member states, which should help the countries to develop their strategies and transfer EU initiatives to the national level.

5.2.1 European Semester

In 2011 the so-called “European Semester”, which is embedded in the Europe 2020 Strategy was launched at the suggestion of the Commission. The European Semester can be described as a governance framework that sets the structure for country surveillance and coordination in the areas of economic and fiscal policy and is divided into several stages within an annual policy cycle. In accordance with the Europe 2020 Strategy the European Semester builds the practical framework in which the goals and objectives of the EU can be monitored by means of a fixed communication procedure between the EU and its member states, allowing the EU to regularly set benchmarks and monitor them by means of country reporting and its assessment. (cp. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/index_en.htm as of 14 July 2014)

In the present section the stages of the European Semester will be listed in a chronological order in order to give an overview of the whole annual process. Next, the role of the area of education within the policy cycle will be examined. In order to give a proper insight, the focus will be placed on two sorts of documents within the communication process between the EU and Austria, namely Austria's annual National Reform Programmes and the country specific recommendations of the Council of education ministers¹¹ that are formulated in response to the national reform programmes. These documents were chosen, because they refer to each other over a period of several years, and therefore certain changes at national level can be directly attributed to the respective recommendations by the Council. This can be assumed, because Austria directly refers to the recommendations and lists measures that were introduced in this respect in order to meet the goals and benchmarks set by the EU.

5.2.1.1 Policy cycle of the European Semester

The annual cycle of the European Semester that mainly focuses on economic policy coordination usually starts at the end of the year with the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey by the Commission. At this stage the broad economic and social priorities are set. In accordance with the Europe 2020 Strategy, where the importance of a knowledge-based economy is stressed and the area of education and training is closely linked to the economic sphere, the growth survey also includes challenges and objectives in the area of education. The Annual Growth Survey is accompanied by an Alert Mechanism Report, which aims at identifying economic risks in the member states and does not cover the area of education. The initiation of the annual policy cycle can be described as the preparatory stage of the European Semester.

The actual first stage of the European Semester takes place from January until March. First, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament give their opinions on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey. Next, the European Council – the heads of state or government of the member states – responds to the Annual Growth Survey by issuing

¹¹ The country specific recommendations are first formulated by the Commission in response to the national reform programmes and are later adopted by the Council. The Council recommendations were chosen, because they constitute the approved version of the Commission's recommendations.

policy orientations, which address the overall macroeconomic situation, the progress with respect to EU targets as well as progress of flagship initiatives, such as the already mentioned “Youth on the move” or the “Agenda for new skills and jobs” initiatives that have been initiated in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The policy orientations serve as guidance for national policies.

In the second stage of the policy cycle starting in April the member states are included in the reporting process and submit their National Reform Programmes as well as their Stability or respectively Convergence Programmes to the Commission where they present their goals and political measures aiming at achieving the Europe 2020 goals, among others in the area of education. The reports include both already initiated measures as well as planned measures.

The communication process continues in May, when the Commission evaluates and assesses the National Reform Programmes and the Stability or Convergence Programmes and makes country specific recommendations for each or sometimes certain member state(s). At this stage the programmes prepared by the member states are also discussed and formally adopted by the Council and endorsed by the European Council. This comprehensive feedback serves as further policy advice prior to the budget setting for the following year at national level. Consequently, the recommendations by the EU institutions have to be considered when concluding the national budgets. Eventually, the member states implement or transfer the country specific recommendations at national level and the process starts again. (cp. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/index_en.htm as of 14 July 2014)

If we look at the area of education within the reporting structure of the European Semester, it seems as if this instrument had a significant impact on the policy area at national level. The area of education is not only very strongly linked to the sphere of economy and finance, but also, and what seems to be an even more significant factor, it has been embedded into the same reporting system as the areas of exclusive and shared competence of the EU. Of course this does not change the fact that the competences, stated in the Treaty of Lisbon in the area of education remain with the member states, however the frequency of reporting might have an influence on the general approach towards education at EU-level. Despite the fact that policy warnings or enforcement through sanctions may

not be issued or imposed within the framework of the European Semester in the area of education, in contrast to the area of economy, e.g. in case of “excessive macroeconomic and budgetary imbalances” (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/index_en.htm as of 14 July 2014), the time consuming reporting is carried out in the same way and in the same reports as in the remaining policy areas. Moreover, it is unlikely that a member state refuses to report on or response to certain goals of the Europe 2020 strategy of the country specific recommendations, also if this area is based on voluntary cooperation at EU-level. In this regard education policy has become part of a new, institutionalised process.

5.2.1.2 Austria’s National Reform Programmes and country specific recommendations from the EU

Austria’s National Reform Programme 2011

In its first National Reform Programme in the framework of the European Semester Austria identifies four main challenges and describes the adequate measures in this respect. In accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy the first challenge involves an increase of the share of education participation, preparing students for university studies and increasing mobility in tertiary education. Concerning the benchmarks set by the EU, Austria planned to increase the share of 30-34 year olds with a university degree to 38% compared to the EU’s target of 40%. The measures that were presented in order to reach these objectives mainly focus on advisory programmes for students, including compulsory study guidance. Additional measures include coordination in the areas of finance or refer to increasing the number of university places. The second focus in Austria’s reform programme of 2011 aims at increasing the number of university graduates in the areas of science and technology. Here the presented measures also involve information and guidance as well as coordination between schools and university to promote young talents in the area of science. The third challenge refers to the improvement of education levels and a reduction of early school leavers, which is associated with a high unemployment risk and social exclusion. In this connection emphasis is put on measures for citizens with a migration background. Austria’s measures include, among others, an increase of full-time school places from 120.000 to 200.000 with the use of resources from the European Social Fund,

the introduction of a new secondary school model, the “Neue Mittelschule” for ten to fourteen year olds as well as changes in teacher training and a new strategy for lifelong learning. The last challenge concerns the quality and permeability of vocational training, which should be tackled by a quality management system as well as the development of standards for apprenticeships. (cp. Bundeskanzleramt 2011)

Country specific recommendations on Austria’s National Reform Programme by the Council 2011

The main point of criticism regarding Austria’s education system deals with the early separation of pupils at the age of ten, when they have to choose their future education path and the limited permeability of the system. According to the Council, this system in particular has an effect on vulnerable youth and may hinder children from reaching higher education levels. (cp. p.2) Moreover, the Council speaks of “outstanding challenges that could usefully have been covered in the commitments including in the areas of [...] education [...]” (p.4) In accordance with the challenges identified by Austria, a need for action is also seen with respect to providing care service and all-day school places as well as to improving educational outcomes and preventing school drop-out. (cp. p4)

Austria’s National Reform Programme 2012

Austria’s National Reform Programme of 2012 provides information on the progress that has been made in connection with the national Europe 2020 goals, the country specific recommendations as well as priorities of the Annual Growth Survey. After only one year of participation in the country reporting in the area of education in the framework of the European Semester Austria’s report in this field is very comprehensive. With respect to the recommendations by the EU-institutions, Austria presents several milestone projects and new initiatives. Apart from the broad spectrum of implemented and planned measures it can be observed that the reporting in the area of education seems to have doubled in quantity compared to the reform programme of 2011. One reason for this development might be the fact that the first reform programme of 2011 marked the starting point in the country reporting- and surveillance system of the European Semester. Another explanation could be that the feedback by the EU in connection to a situation of direct competition with

other member states additionally motivated or pressured Austria to cover the area of education in such a comprehensive way.

The initiated and planned measures include, among others, the following areas, out of which some have already been mentioned in the report of 2011:

- Early school leavers
- All-day school forms
- The new secondary school model “Neue Mittelschule”
- Changes in teacher education
- A national strategy for lifelong learning
- A new, common school-leaving exam
- Second-chance education paths and re-entrance into education, in particular for citizens with a migration background
- Consulting and guidance in the area of vocational training and education
- A quality management system for vocational training
- Apprenticeships combined with A-levels (Matura) in order to increase education levels of apprentices and thus improve employability (cp. Bundeskanzleramt 2012:33)

In terms of institutional changes, which are introduced with the reform programme, among others, two new bodies were set up. The first one is mentioned in connection with a university strategy for better coordination, high quality of education and international visibility. In order to coordinate thematic and financial activities in this respect it is planned to establish an institutionalised coordinating body as well as new instruments and communication structures. In the area of lifelong learning Austria initiated the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning in 2011. Representatives of four ministries in the areas of education; science, research and economy; labour, social affairs and consumer protection formed a task force responsible for coordination. Moreover, the establishment of a national platform for lifelong learning was planned for 2012. (cp. Bundeskanzleramt 2012)

Country specific recommendations on Austria's National Reform Programme by the Council 2012

The Council recommendations of 2012 in the area of education partly consist of the same points as in the previous reporting period, such as the issue of high drop-out rates and the identification of a need for action with respect to educational outcomes, but also feature new areas of interest. The need to improve educational outcomes is reaffirmed by mentioning the results of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which are below EU average. Moreover, it is criticised that the socio-economic background of students plays a significant role with respect to the education achievements. This feedback implies that the measures presented by Austria either need more time to show effects or are not appropriate for the given challenges.

Another point of criticism is made with respect to educational achievements of people with a migration background. According to the Council the potential in this area is not fully used. Moreover, problems are identified as to the recognition of qualifications that have been acquired abroad. This topic corresponds with the second-chance education paths as well as the possibility of re-entering the education system, especially for citizens with a migration background, envisaged by Austria.

The last and biggest challenge, according to the Council is the Austrian mass university system. The criticism implies shortfalls with respect to the organisation and financing of tertiary education, since there is a high number of students, but also comparatively high drop-out rates of about 40%. (cp. Council of the European Union 2012:9)

Austria's National Reform Programme 2013

The reform programme of 2013 was prepared in view of the anticipated stagnation and high unemployment rates in the EU. Therefore, Austria re-affirmed the importance of contributing to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals. Apart from measures that were already introduced in the last reporting period, Austria presents a broad range of initiatives aiming at the improvement of organisational structures, financing and efficiency in the education sector. These measures include:

- An administrative reform in the area of education to slim down organisational structures
- Additional possibilities for acquiring higher qualifications, in particular for employees with low qualifications (“Fachkräftepaket 2013)
- The facilitation of participation in “educational leave”
- The introduction of part time educational leave as a new instrument due to the fact that the initial full time educational leave was mainly used by employees with high qualifications
- Scholarships for skilled employees in shortage occupations with a budget of 25 million EUR per year
- Individual youth coaching aiming at reducing drop-out rates
- Additional reporting in the framework of the lifelong learning strategy to the Austrian council of ministers
- Incorporating educational standards and competence orientation for primary and secondary education in the school education act (Schulunterrichtsgesetz) in order to ensure a high level of quality in education

Country specific recommendations on Austria’s National Reform Programme by the Council 2013

The response to Austria’s National Reform Programme of 2013 by the Council does not comprise completely new recommendations. The criticism includes the usual challenges since 2011, namely the educational outcomes for 10-15 year olds that are well below EU average as well as considerable achievement gaps between people with migration backgrounds and natives in comparison to other EU members. Recommendations are further made with respect to strategic planning at university level. Points of criticism regarding negative effects of early tracking and high drop-out rates remain the same. In addition, the Council also mentions the need to enhance early childhood education.

Education and Training Monitor

The Education and Training Monitor published by the European Commission is a fairly new instrument that was launched in 2012 in connection with the country specific recommendations of the European Semester as well as in view of the new EU education programme Erasmus+, which will be covered in the next section. The report will be

launched annually in order to show progress of member states in achieving the ET 2020 benchmarks and indicators through comparative analysis. It is also described as a tool that should initiate and facilitate reforms in the area of education. In general this report is an important aspect of peer pressure, because it includes country reports identifying the highest and lowest performers among the EU member states in terms of achieving the benchmarks set by the ET 2020 strategy as well as the Europe 2020 goals. The figures presented in the report are drawn from Eurostat as well as various surveys. (cp. European Commission 2013) In addition, an online visualisation tool facilitates the comparison of member states with the help of interactive maps and easy access to EU targets and national achievements of respective benchmarks.

(cp. http://ec.europa.eu/education/dashboard/index_en.htm as of 16 July 2014)

The second Education and Training Monitor report published in 2013 was prepared before the background of various challenges connected to the difficult economic situation in Europe including the decrease of spending on education and training in many member states, the fact that Europe's working-age population is not in line with requirements of the labour market and other obstacles that still exist with respect to the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. In view of the strong trend to cut costs in all policy areas, the investments made in the area of education and training are compared against outcomes in this field. Moreover, ways of maximising efficiency are presented. In order to overcome shortcomings in member states that had to cut costs in the area of education and training, the next generation of European and Structural Funds should assist member states in the future to a greater extent than this was the case until now. (cp. European Commission 2013)

As to the assessment of Austria's progress with respect to the last country specific recommendations the report identifies some areas which still require action, but also other areas, where Austria ranks among the best performers and is considered a model student. To name some examples, it is noted that although Austria is among those countries that have not decreased their overall education and training budgets between 2008-2011, it has nevertheless reduced the spending per student at certain education levels, namely in tertiary and upper secondary education. In connection with an increase in university enrolments it is anticipated that the spending per students might be further cut. On the other hand efficiency gains are expected as a result of more effective administration.

Another point of criticism involves the below-average use of computers at Austrian schools, where the figures are only slightly higher than in Romania. Regarding this topic the report refers to surveys of schools that show that results in this area are better, if there are formal policies and support measures, which might also provide impetus for Austria to act and e.g. introduce appropriate measures. The fact that only one in three students across all grades is taught by IT-savvy teachers, who have participated in IT courses should also lead to changes in teacher training or an improve of public information measures aiming at better promotion of training possibilities supported by the EU. Good feedback for Austria in the framework of the Education and Training Monitor refers to the adoption of national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework and the good results for early school leavers. Although Austria had already reached the EU target of below 10%, it managed to further reduce the number of drop-outs. Nevertheless, the remaining figure includes a high number of students with a migration background. In this issue Austria's results are among the worst in the EU. New strategies adopted to tackle these problems were appreciated by the report. The analysis of each benchmark and indicator is concluded with overall policy lessons. (cp. European Commission 2013)

5.3 Erasmus+ Programme

European programmes in the areas of education, training, youth and sport have been used as instruments in these fields for more than 25 years. The new Erasmus+ Programme is a very comprehensive programme for education, training, youth and sport and was designed in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy for the period from 2014 to 2020. Apart from contributing to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals and benchmarks set by the EU, it also takes into consideration the ET 2020 Strategy, the European Youth Strategy and the EU external action. In addition, it promotes transparency and the recognition of qualifications and supports instruments in this area, such as the common EU curriculum vitae – the Europass, the European Qualifications Framework as well as quality assurance instruments. The programme covers a wide range of activities, since it integrates various already existing programmes that have been implemented by the Commission between 2007 and 103, namely:

- “The Lifelong Learning Programme
- The Youth in Action Programme¹²
- The Erasmus Mundus Programme¹³
- Tempus¹⁴
- Alfa¹⁵
- Edulink¹⁶
- Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education”
(European Commission 2014:10)

Moreover, the Erasmus+ Programme combines all other existing actions and activities with the aim of removing boundaries, improving effectiveness and creating synergies. The following list gives an overview of all Erasmus+ fields of action and activities. The names of the already existing programmes were kept for the purpose of orientation of former participants.

- Erasmus+: Comenius, in relation to the activities of the Programme exclusively related to the field of school education;
- Erasmus+: Erasmus, relating to the field of higher education and targeting programme countries;
- Erasmus+: Leonardo da Vinci, relating to the field of vocational education and training;
- Erasmus+: Grundtvig, relating to the field of adult learning;
- Erasmus+: Jean Monnet, relating to the field of European Union studies;

¹² The Youth in Action Programme is a programme aiming at inspiring a sense of active citizens, solidarity and tolerance as well as inviting young people to shape the future of the EU, operating since 2007. This programme was the successor of the YOUTH Programme for mobility, non-formal learning, intercultural dialogue and inclusion, which ran from 2000 to 2006. (http://ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/youth-in-action_en.htm as of 12 July 2014)

¹³ The Erasmus Mundus Programme is a cooperation and mobility programme in the area of higher education operating since 2004 (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/programme/about_erasmus_mundus_en.php as of 12 July 2014)

¹⁴ The Tempus Programme is a programme aiming at modernising higher education in partner countries of the EU including countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the West Balkans and the Mediterranean region, operating since 1990 (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/programme/about_tempus_en.php#background as of 12 July 2014)

¹⁵ The Alfa Programme is a cooperation programme between higher education institutions of the EU and Latin America, operating since 1994. (http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/latin-america/regional-cooperation/alfa/detail_en.htm as of 12 July 2014)

¹⁶ The Edulink Programme is a cooperation programme in higher education between the EU and 79 member states of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group, operating since 2006. (<http://www.acp-edulink.eu/node/15498> as of 12 July 2014)

- Erasmus+: Sports (European Commission 2014:10)

Erasmus+ operates with an overall budget of 14.774 billion EUR for the whole period and provides organisations, institutions and bodies at national level with the opportunity to make use of these funds for various projects. Moreover, the programme targets a great number of people including students, trainees, apprentices, pupils, adult learners, young people, volunteers, professors, teachers, trainers, youth workers as well as professionals in the respective areas. The high budget and the broad range of activities supported by the new programme reflect the importance of the area of education with respect to tackling socio-economic challenges, especially in terms of better employability, competitiveness and innovation and therefore social equity and inclusion. On the basis of special decisions and agreements, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and Macedonia may also participate in the programme in addition to the EU member states. Projects submitted by the participating organisations may include activities within the EU, but also international projects. (cp. European Commission 2014 Erasmus+ Guide)

A big focus of the programme is placed on multilingualism as well as equity and inclusion. With regard to multilingualism the programme promotes language learning and linguistic diversity by providing funds for mobility programmes in form of traineeships of volunteering abroad, but also e-learning. Funds are also allocated for language teaching and learning in partner countries in the framework of strategic partnerships. With regard to promoting equity and inclusion, actions of the programme take into consideration disabilities of participants, educational difficulties, economic- social or geographical obstacles, etc.

5.3.1 Bodies involved in the Erasmus+ Programme

The Erasmus+ Programme is run by the European Commission, which manages the budget and sets priorities. Moreover, the Commission is responsible for guiding and monitoring the implementation of actions and evaluating the programme. In its tasks, the Commission is supported by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), which operates since 2006 under the supervision of the Directorates-General for Education and Culture, Communication and Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection. (cp.

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea_en as of 12 July 2014). The EACEA is responsible for implementing the Erasmus+ actions at European level and for launching calls for proposals. At national level national agencies were established to implement the programme in the member states. In Austria the “Österreichischer Austauschdienst” OeAD – an agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research – was entrusted with this responsibility.

(cp. http://www.oead.at/oead_infos_services/about_us/mission_tasks/EN/ as of 12 July 2014) The agencies at national level, such as the OeAD act as a link between the member states and the Commission. Their tasks with respect to the Erasmus+ Programme include, among others, executing certain budget implementation tasks, administering the selection procedure for applicants as well as providing support to applicants. Moreover, they cooperate with other networks, services and bodies that are part of the Erasmus+ cooperation network including the EURYDICE Network, E-Twinning Support Services, the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts, the Euroguidance Network, Europass National Centres, National Academic Recognition Information Centres, the Network of National Teams of ECVET Experts, SALTO Youth Resource Centres and the Eurodesk Network. The listed networks and services will not be further covered; however the broad range of cooperation partner shows how many areas are covered by the programme, which helps to imagine the broad spectrum of possible synergies between the involved parties. (cp. European Commission 2014 Erasmus+ Programme Guide)

5.3.2 Programme structure

The Erasmus+ Programme is structured into three key actions that will be briefly described in the following section.

Key action 1 refers to the mobility of individuals and supports the areas: Mobility of learners and staff, joint master degrees as well as the master student loan guarantee. In this respect funds are provided for learning or professional experiences abroad as well as scholarships for international master programmes and loans for full Master Degrees abroad. Actions in this connection should aim at e.g. improving learning performance, increasing employability and language competence, improving various soft-skills and strengthening awareness of the European project and EU values. Professionals working in

the area of education and training should also benefit from key action 1 in terms of e.g. increasing their competences, learning from best practices or better understanding interconnections between education and the labour market. All in all this key action's objective involves the capacity of participants to operate at EU and international level in accordance with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Key action 2 refers to cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices and supports the areas: Transnational strategic partnerships for the exchange of know-how and fostering of innovation; knowledge alliances between higher education institutions and enterprises; sector skills alliances in order to develop joint vocational training curricula programmes tailored to specific sectors; capacity building to support partner countries in the areas of higher education and youth as well as IT support platforms.

Key action 3 refers to support for policy reforms and supports the gathering of information in form of e.g. country-specific analyses or peer learning reviews that can be used for monitoring. Other actions supported in this respect are e.g. initiatives to foster innovation and to test the effectiveness of policies; support activities with respect to the recognition of qualifications, quality, cross-European exchanges, mobility, etc.; cooperation with international organisations as well as actions fostering dialogue of stakeholders and the promotion of the programme.

5.3.3 Austria's participation in lifelong learning activities in figures

In the past reporting period covering the years 2007-2011 EU education programmes were quite popular among participants from Austria. Figures published by Austria show that for or all measures and actions that were offered in the framework of lifelong learning programmes for schools the number of participants either increased or remained the same. The budget allocated to Austria for education programmes was increased as well. Austria used 99.8% of allocated funds in the area of education, which is an extraordinarily high figure compared to other member states, which may be attributed to the increased number of applications, out of which 70% were approved. As to the regional interest in EU education programmes schools in Vienna made out one quarter of the overall participation, followed by Styria with 16%, Upper Austria with 15% and Lower Austria with 14%.

Highly demanded areas included e.g. training for teachers. During the five years of the reporting period about 280 trainings abroad per year were completed and involved e.g. training courses, internships, sitting in on lectures or attending conferences abroad. Moreover 10,142 stays for pupils and teachers abroad were funded in the reporting period, including a high number of pupils from vocational schools. The so-called Regio Partnerships aiming at the development and transfer of pedagogical concepts on regionally relevant topics were supported with an amount of over 37,000 EUR per project. 400 schools participated in cross-border activities, which was, among others, coordinated by the E-Twinning platform. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:9-11)

5.4 The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework is a result of the Copenhagen process, which was launched in 2002 and aims at improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) (see historical overview). As already described, the Maastricht Communiqué of 2004 called for the development of common references and principles in form of a European Qualifications Framework for the area of VET, but also for secondary and higher education at both European and national levels. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:23) Finally, in 2008 the European Parliament and the Council adopted a recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning reaffirming the importance of creating such a tool: “The development and recognition of citizens’ knowledge, skills and competence are crucial for the development of individuals, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion in the Community. Such development and recognition should facilitate transnational mobility for workers and learners and contribute to meeting the requirements of supply and demand of the European labour market [...]” (European Parliament, Council 2008:1)¹⁷ The basic function of the new instrument should be to enable the translation between qualification systems and levels of EU member states and partner countries. The EQF should also have an effect on national systems, as each level should be attainable by a variety of education paths. This might aim at or provide impetus for reforms at national level, e.g. in the case of Austria, since the limited permeability of Austria’s education system was criticised in the

¹⁷ The objectives of the European Qualifications Framework were also reaffirmed in other documents, e.g. in the Communication from the Commission of 2012 on “Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes”

framework of recommendations in the context of the European Semester. (see country specific recommendations of 2011) Besides, the EQF's objectives also include the modernisation of national education systems. In general, emphasis is placed on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the use of a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) as well as the development of key competences for lifelong learning. Furthermore, the EQF should be underpinned by agreed upon principles of quality assurance. (cp. European Parliament, Council 2008)

As to the influence of the European Qualifications Framework at national level, it is recommended that member states use the EQF as a reference tool and relate their national qualifications systems to the European framework by 2010. In addition, National Qualification Frameworks should be developed. In practice, all new certificates and diplomas that are awarded should contain reference to the EQF by 2012. When creating National Qualifications Frameworks member states should apply the principles of quality assurance stated in Annex III of the recommendation, which should be based on regular evaluation and self-evaluation of institutions and programmes by external monitoring bodies as well as feedback mechanisms. The quality assurance process is also described as an intergovernmental cooperation process that should take place across different education and training levels and systems. In this respect member states should be supported by the European Commission, which should facilitate cooperation and the exchange of good practice by e.g. launching pilot projects in the framework of education programmes or through public information activities. Moreover, an advisory group consisting of representatives of member states, social partners and other stakeholders should integrate national stakeholders into the activities at EU level. National coordination points should support activities in member states. (cp. European Parliament, Council 2008) In Austria a coordination point was established in the framework of the National Agency for Lifelong Learning.¹⁸ The European Qualifications Framework presented in the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Commission identifies eight levels which are characterised by certain knowledge, skills and competences ranging from basic general knowledge for level 1 to most advanced knowledge for level 8. (cp. European Parliament,

¹⁸ Koordinierungsstelle für den Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen (NQR) in Österreich (http://www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/ as of 15 July 2014)

Council 2008: Annex II) As recommended, the Austrian NQF is based on the European framework

(<http://www.lebenslanges->

[lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/die_entwicklung_des_nqr_in_oesterreich/](http://www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/die_entwicklung_des_nqr_in_oesterreich/) as of 15 July 2014), however there are still some problems with respect to the attribution of certain education outcomes to the respective levels of the framework. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:24)

6 Main findings with respect to the Europeanisation debate

6.1 Reference to the chosen definition

The present chapter refers to the Europeanisation debate, which was covered at the beginning of the thesis. The aim of this chapter is to link the theoretical approach with the descriptions of Austria's educational cooperation at European level and draw conclusions with respect to chosen aspects and questions of Europeanisation. In order to repeat the overall understanding of the concept of Europeanisation the chosen approach by Radaelli should be called to mind:

“Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.” (Radaelli 2004:3)

and further

“Europeanisation takes place when: The EU becomes a cognitive and normative frame, and provides orientation to the logics of meaning and action. There is a process of change, either in response to EU pressure or as usage of Europe.” (Radaelli 2004:11)

This approach formed a good basis for this thesis and helped to link different processes and procedures at national level to the concept of Europeanisation. The overview and analysis of Austrian educational cooperation at EU level further showed, how the EU became a cognitive and normative frame for Austria's education policy and that strategies and goals, which are agreed upon at EU level provide orientation at national level, very often leading to changes in the area of education policy.

6.2 Triggering factors for changes in national policy

The first aspect of Europeanisation is linked to the question of the triggering factors for change in form of institutionalisation or changes in policies at national level and the assumption that it is very difficult to assess, which changes can be attributed to the influence of the EU and which changes would have occurred anyways e.g. due to “increased policy competition between countries as a result of growing exchange of information” (Vink, Graziano 2007:16). According to the Austrian education report of 2012 Austria uses its international experiences e.g. from the participation in EU educational programmes to draw conclusions for national reforms. (cp. BIFIE 2012: introduction) The analysis of reporting and monitoring processes in connection with EU education policy also showed that certain recommendations and policy advice by EU institutions, e.g. in form of country specific recommendations in the framework of the European Semester actually lead to changes at national level, such as institutionalisation that can be clearly linked to the EU’s influence in this respect. To give an example, this is the case with the national coordination point for the National Qualifications Framework, which was set up as a result of numerous EU documents calling for a European Qualifications Framework and the consequent establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks that should be linked to the European framework in the first place. Later this goal was integrated into a EU strategy and became a natural part of the mind set of EU cooperation. Of course the idea as such might have been picked up at national level without the interference of the EU, however it can be also assumed that the large scale of this undertaking with respect to comparing national education levels with all other member states would not have been as effective as with the orientation provided by the EU, because it is rather unlikely that all EU member states would have agreed on the best reference model. There are of course more examples of institutionalisation in form of bodies or agencies that have been established to administer and implement EU programmes and instruments at national level, such as the umbrella body of the above mentioned national point – the Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD). As to the possibility that change in national education policies occurred as a result of increased policy competition between member states as a result of growing exchange of information, the analysis of EU level processes implies that this is linked to the EU’s influence as well, because the growing exchange of information takes place in the framework of cooperation coordinated by the EU. In addition, this can

also be backed by the fact that the voluntary cooperation in the field of education involves the introduction of various monitoring and reporting instruments that were accepted by the member states. These instruments reinforce the exchange of information and in particular portray, which member state is the highest and lowest performer with respect to the set benchmarks and indicators (see Education and Training Monitor as well as its online visualisation tool). The direct comparison and outlined weaknesses, also in case of Austria, may of course constitute triggering factors for national change, however it has to be kept in mind that this direct comparison takes place in the framework of EU instruments.

6.3 Fit/misfit and mediating factors

The next aspect refers to the questions of “fit/misfit” as well as “mediating factors” from the three-step model by Caporaso¹⁹, which was covered in the context of the Europeanisation debate. According to the model the fit/misfit aspect can influence national responses to European integration. Since there is no or very limited integration in the area of education in terms of powers conferred to the EU, in this case it rather refers to EU strategies in general or more precisely to the degree to which EU goals and targets in the area of education fit with already existing national laws and national targets. When we compare EU goals with national goals and refer to the explanations of the Austrian education report of 2012, it can be said that for the most part goals and targets set by the EU fit national goals and targets, although there are small gaps concerning the need for action in some respects. In addition, progress reports show that the majority of EU spheres of activity in the area of education are covered by national projects and initiatives. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:8,21) All in all there is a good fit and thus, according to the model, little adaptational pressure, because changes do not require great effort, which could explain or constitute one aspect of Austria’s “role model” position in the context of EU education policy. With respect to the second chosen aspect of the model – the mediating factors (e.g. formal or informal institutions, veto groups) – the example of the new secondary school (Neue Mittelschule) comes to ones mind. On the one hand there is a good fit between EU and national goals with respect to the establishment of this kind of school form. As described in the country specific recommendations, the EU criticises the

¹⁹ Adapted from Risse, T., Cowles, M. G., & Caporaso, J. (2001). Europeanization and domestic change: Introduction. Transforming Europe: Europeanization and domestic change, 1-20. (cp. Caporaso in Vink, Graziano 2007:28)

early tracking of the Austrian schools system and recommends a common school for 10-14 year olds. The common school form was established and became a regular school form in Austria, however only as an alternative to the still existing school forms that separate children according to education results at a very early age. The EU's initiative and recommendations in this area may have backed up opponents of early tracking; on the other hand there are strong veto players in form of certain political parties, which interfere with the EU's strategy.

6.4 Motives of Austria's participation in EU education policy

As to the general motives for participating in the framework of EU educational cooperation three main reasons could be made out. The first and very obvious one is the financial aspect. The participation in EU educational programmes (currently in the Erasmus+ programme) ensures Austria a significant financial advantage compared to the financial means that would be available without EU cooperation. This is especially important in connection to the good fit between national and EU goals and targets, because EU funds can be used for areas that would have needed funding anyways. In view of the weak economic situation in Europe additional funds from the EU are especially valuable. Another reason for cooperation has already been mentioned and relates to the potential of EU strategies to back up national reform plans. If certain reform plans fit the recommendations of the EU, advocates of such endeavours may benefit from additional expertise that may push these plans. The third motive for cooperation at European level can be broadly described as good experience. The reporting processes and activities within educational cooperation at EU level may be very work-intensive, however they serve as a basis for identifying shortcomings. In this way the quality of education and training can be gradually increased. This perception is also shared by Huisman and Van der Wende, who argue that "much of the fear of national governments for intervention in domestic affairs has been erased by positive experiences and developments [...]" (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:355) In this connection they write about the increasing mobility possibilities, financial benefits as well as great political leeway. Moreover the authors point out that countries, such as Austria "have developed policies that fit the European agenda towards converging systems of higher education". (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:355) In view of the new instruments, such as the European Semester this statement could as well be

extended to the area of vocational training and to a limited extent also to general education. Referring to an EU-funded research project²⁰ Huisman and Van der Wende conclude that the overall picture implies that the “[...] gradually and rather smoothly adjusting to the broader supra- and international agenda is confirmed.” (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:255)

6.5 The potential of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

Radaelli describes the Open Method of Coordination as producing “opportunities for learning – the default explanation of Europeanisation for this mode” (Radaelli 2004:13)” on the one hand; on the other hand he assesses the potential of the OMC as “limited when domestic coalitions for reforms are weak, or stakeholders do not engage creatively with the imported institutional models.” (Radaelli 2004:13) When looking at Austria’s extensive cooperation in the area of education at EU level as well as the largely positive experiences and developments, it can be assumed that the potential of the OMC in the field of education has been fully used by both the EU and Austria. As already discussed, the allegedly limited possibilities of the OMC have been used as a platform for national reforms, a booster for quality in education and training, etc. At this point it should be noted that a general assessment of the implementation of EU initiatives at national level is still very difficult. The good fit of strategies and targets at national and EU level often poses difficulties when it comes to identifying the exact motives for policy change and thus to assess the impact of the Open Method of Coordination. In addition, a general impact analysis requires long-term observations. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:28) Due to the fact that the European Semester was only introduced in 2011, an in-depth impact analysis will require more time.

²⁰ „EU-funded Fifth Framework Programme (Improving Human Potential and the Socio-economic Knowledge Base) research project ‘Higher Education Institutions’ Responses to Europeanisation, Internationalisation and Globalisation’ (HEIGLO), SERD 2002-00074” (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:349)

7 Criticism

Points of criticism voiced in connection with Europeanisation in the area of education refer to the current practice and developments on the one hand and fears in connection with greater influence of the EU on the other hand. With respect to the latter, education policy is seen as one of the few areas where member states “still possess the power of control” (Walkenhorst 2005:2). Walkenhorst further describes education policy as part of identity policy, where “[...] it operates as a cross-generational transmitter of political culture.” (Walkenhorst 2005:2) An increase in EU competences or legislative competences in the hands of the EU are seen as a threat to cultural identity, since the EU could interfere with national education content. This is also considered as the reason, why member states wish to continue to cooperate outside of the Community method. Walkenhorst even describes the “period before the Maastricht Treaty [as] leading towards a genuine EC education policy without legal basis.” (2005:5) Huisman and Van der Wende also see the growing involvement of the EU in the area of education and observe that “the supranational level used strong financial incentives to achieve its objective [...]” (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:352). Nevertheless they also argue that “much of the fear of national governments for intervention in domestic affairs has been erased by positive experiences and developments [...]” (Huisman, Van der Wende 2004:355). Often the increased competence of the Commission in the area of education policy (as described by Gutknecht-Gmeiner 2012:7 for example) is linked with negative developments in terms of unintended EU influence in the area of education. To some extent this notion can be attributed to the fear that the Commission that is now responsible for facilitating cooperation might develop a life of its own, since the European Semester, which has become a quite powerful instrument in the area of education, was also launched at the suggestion of the Commission.

8 Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that the cooperation-, support- and supplementing activities or EU education policy generally aim at reforming national education systems, which is also indicated in several official documents and strategies. Instruments, such as the European Qualifications Framework are set up to have an effect on national systems, in this case they e.g. aim at the modernisation of the education and training system in Austria as well as the promotion of better permeability of the system, which might require reform. In order to achieve these objectives additional instruments, such as the Education and Training Monitor have been developed. However, until now EU reform plans of national education systems merely refer to the organisational structure of the system, which should be reformed in order to improve quality, educational outputs and social inclusion. In accordance with the Treaty provisions the EU's competence technically stops at the content that is taught in the member states. At this point it can be argued that the legally constituted "border of competence" is blurred at some times and tendencies towards increased influence in this context can be observed. This can be e.g. assumed when countries are "invited" to put a stronger focus on areas that are demanded on the labour market, such as technology, engineering or entrepreneurship. In this case the EU may indicate the desired direction, however the member states may generally decide how they plan to reach these goals. On the other hand there are examples of direct policy advice by the EU including already formulated country specific measures that should "push" the member states in the desired direction. It can be therefore said that, although the EU lacks relevant competences in the area of education it somehow tries to compensate this by intensive guidance and the creation of strong instruments, such as the European Semester. Interference in areas that are strongly linked to culture and national identity, such as history can be still excluded at national education level, although common European contents are transported in an indirect way. This may involve the integration of European content into EU education programmes or the development of new project content as described by Gutknecht-Gmeiner 2012. The fear that national cultural identity might be endangered through the influence of the EU in this field is certainly one of the reasons, why member states have not conferred legislative powers to the EU in the area of education and that cooperation at European level takes place outside of the Community method in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination.

All in all the EU is strongly engaged in the area of education, which can be also claimed in view of the steadily growing number of instruments, which is sometimes described as virtually incalculable. Although the area of education is not legislated at EU-level, there is a broad, comprehensive set of activities in this policy sphere administered by the EU as well as an enormous amount of information in form of reports, conclusions and recommendations by the involved institutions. The information in this respect is very easily accessible, which makes it easy to compare the situations and developments of the EU member countries in terms of achievements and shortfalls. Moreover, special instrument, such as a visualisation tool on the EU Commission's homepage facilitate the access to and comparison of information. The visualisation of the achievements of benchmarks by each member state as well as pointing out the highest and lowest performers foster competition thinking in the EU countries. Although the participation in the EU's education cooperation framework is voluntary, the transparency and clear goal-setting may have an impact on national policymaking in the area of education, because the institutionalised activities involved in the voluntary process are very time consuming, since they require regular reporting. As the reports are prepared by national ministries and other government institutions, where positions were created or adjusted in order to cover the responsibilities in this respect, the process as such not only becomes incorporated into the Austrian system, it also becomes something natural with time. Since the reports demand as much preparation, etc. as other policy areas and also involve great effort in terms of finances and human capital, the process as such cannot be distinguished from other policy areas that are legislated at EU level. In this connection Gutknecht-Gmeiner also argues that, compared to the early years of cooperation, the "soft pressure" (translated from German) of the Open Method of Coordination on member states has significantly increased in the last few years due to continuous reporting and strict monitoring by the Commission. (cp. Gutknecht-Gmeiner in BIFIE 2012:8)

An interesting question with respect to future developments is, what would change, if member states actually transferred competences in the area of education to the European Union? The most obvious change is the possibility to legislate in the area of education within the Community method, which would involve the adoption of secondary law that would have to be transposed at national level. Especially for Austria, this factor has a strong psychological aspect. Since we have concluded that Austria is considered a model

student in many areas and there is generally a good fit between EU- and national targets one might ask oneself, if the difference would be noticeable at all, especially in view of the already existing extensive reporting and monitoring process in the framework of the European Semester. On the other hand, as already discussed, the possibility to legislate in this area would also involve the option to interfere with content and therefore pose a threat to Austria's cultural identity. As to the consequences with respect to non-compliance with EU strategies, from today's point of view it is very unlikely that sanctions would be imposed on member states in the area of education. Even in this very unlikely scenario this possibility would play a subordinate or even non-existing role, if we consider that even in the area of economy the execution of sanctions is limited to the last resort of naming and shaming.

In general the current situation and level of cooperation in the area of education must be seen in the context of current challenges and opportunities. In this connection it has to be emphasised that the latest EU strategies and the strong linkage of education policy with the economic sphere go back to the need of finding appropriate responses to the economic and financial crisis as well as the closely linked aspect of competitiveness in a globalised world. Thus, the further development of the area of education at European level will strongly depend on the political and economic situation of Europe and the overall strategies that will be chosen to tackle given challenges. Regardless of the exact direction in which EU education policy will head, activities in this policy area will certainly not decrease. Since the competence is still with the member states, it remains to be seen, how they will shape their future in this important area.

9 Annex

9.1 I German Abstract

Die Masterarbeit mit dem Titel “The EU’s influence on Austria’s education policy” beschäftigt sich mit dem Einfluss der Europäischen Union auf nationale Bildungssysteme mit einem besonderen Fokus auf Österreich. Obwohl der Bereich Bildung außerhalb der legislativen Kompetenz der EU liegt, da die Mitgliedstaaten diese Kompetenzen nicht an die EU abgegeben haben, scheint der Einfluss der Union in diesem Politikbereich in den letzten Jahren deutlich zugenommen zu haben. Anhand von ausgesuchten Aspekten aus dem Konzept der Europäisierung, auf dem sich die Arbeit stützt, wird ein Überblick über die Entwicklungen und das Ausmaß des Einflusses der EU im weiteren Sinne gegeben. Das Ziel der Arbeit ist es zu veranschaulichen, wie Instrumente auf EU-Ebene auf die nationale Bildungspolitik einwirken und wie sich die Kompetenzen der EU im Bildungsbereich entwickeln. Nach einer theoretischen Einführung in das Konzept der Europäisierung und einer Definition des Begriffs “EU-Bildungspolitik” gibt die Arbeit einen Überblick über die rechtlichen Grundlagen, geschichtlichen Entwicklungen sowie über das Instrument der Offenen Methode der Koordinierung, welches als Rahmen für EU-Bildungszusammenarbeit dient. Des Weiteren werden Strategien, Instrumente und Programme der EU im Bereich Bildung vorgestellt.

Die Analyse anhand ausgesuchter Aspekte der Europäisierungsdebatte deutet darauf hin, dass vor allem die neuesten EU-Instrumente im Bildungsbereich einen erhöhten Einfluss auf die österreichische Bildungspolitik haben und dass das Potential der Offenen Methode der Koordinierung, welches oft als gering eingestuft wird, im Bildungsbereich voll ausgeschöpft wird. Hier ist insbesondere die Einbettung des Bildungsbereiches in das aufwendige Berichts- und Monitoringsystem des Europäischen Semesters zu nennen, das eine noch stärkere Verknüpfung des Bildungsbereichs mit dem Bereich der Wirtschaft vorsieht. In diesem Zusammenhang ist zu erwarten, dass diese enge Verknüpfung weiterbestehen wird und die Entwicklung von Bildungsstrategien auf EU-Ebene noch stärker mit der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung zusammenhängen wird, wodurch der Druck der EU auf nationale Systeme weiter zunehmen könnte.

9.2 II Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

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Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency: Erasmus Mundus Programme

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/programme/about_erasmus_mundus_en.php (as of 12 June 2014)

Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency: Tempus Programme

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/programme/about_tempus_en.php#background (as of 12 June 2014)

EduLink: ACP-EU cooperation programme in higher education

<http://www.acp-edulink.eu/node/15498> (12 July 2014)

EuropeAid: Alfa Programme

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/latin-america/regional-cooperation/alfa/detail_en.htm
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European Commission: Erasmus +

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/youth-in-action_en.htm (as of 12 June 2014)

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European Free Trade Association

<http://www.efta.int/> (as of 15 July 2014)

European Union: Copenhagen Process

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Nationalagentur Lebenslanges Lernen: Die Entwicklung des Nationalen

Qualifikationsrahmens

<http://www.lebenslanges->

[lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/die_entwicklung_des_nqr_in_oesterreich/](http://www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/die_entwicklung_des_nqr_in_oesterreich/) (as of 15 July 2014)

Nationalagentur Lebenslanges Lernen: Koordinierungsstelle für den Nationalen

Qualifikationsrahmen:

<http://www.lebenslanges->

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