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**Increasing imperative of the intercultural education  
in European policies, initiatives and actions**

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**ABSTRACT**

Through increasing cultural diversity of European countries education in general and higher education in particular become the constructive force to promote social cohesion and integration. The European higher education policies have manifested the increasing attention towards importance of intercultural learning at all levels of education including higher education. In the research the major EU policy-related documents, initiatives, programmes and organizations responsible for education policies are analyzed through introducing of the key themes and priorities connected with development of intercultural learning. The chronological scope of the study covers the last twenty-year period due to the enormous changes occurred in the field of higher education under increasing multicultural perspective in Europe.

**Key words:** European education policies; Higher education; Intercultural education.

## I. Introduction

At the outset it should be pointed that education and education policies are the key areas to support cultural diversity and cohesion in Europe and to equip young people with the particular knowledge and skills related to the nowadays' multicultural reality. Currently Europe represents the ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity and faces a variety of challenges, including populism, xenophobia, intolerance, discrimination and disinformation. It is clear that without appropriate policies, which place intercultural competence at the heart of all education, and, above all, without the everyday practice of developing the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge needed for mutual understanding, no sustainable societal change is possible (Huder and Brotto, 2012).

The last decade in Europe cannot be described as a period of peaceful, harmonious development of multicultural societies where citizens appreciate cultural diversity. Migration has been considered to be historically high in Europe, and the refugee flow of the last years was recognized by EU officials as a crisis. Unfortunately, manifestations of prejudice, discrimination and hate speech have become common, and certain political parties advocate extremist ideas. There is an increasing trend of viewing immigration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism through the prism of potential threats and problems (Sikorskaya, 2017). These problems are linked to socio-economic and political inequalities and misunderstandings between people from different cultural backgrounds and affiliations. Education is most fruitfully seen interacting with structural and cultural realities; there is a dynamic and dialectic relationship between education and society (Daun, 2009). An educational system does not exist in a historical and social vacuum. It functions within the framework of a dominant culture with specific political outlooks, attitudes, values and norms. But these frameworks are not static; they are continuously changing (Council of Europe, 2005).

According to Banks and McGee (2009), intercultural education (IE) encompasses the development and implementation of official policies and reforms that aim to promote equal education opportunities to culturally and/or ethnically diverse groupings, regardless of

origin, social rank, gender or disability. The importance of education and educational institutions in shaping society's views on identity, cultural pluralism and social cohesion, has been increasingly acknowledged by both the EU and national governments across Europe. The EU authoritative bodies have undertaken various initiatives and actions to address the cultural diversity in education institutions and beyond. In recent decades the EU institutions have become a major supranational player in education with school-related issues shifting from a small concern of the EU to a major focus of the organization's activities (Dale and Robertson, 2009 in Faas et al., 2014).

It is needed to say, that European higher education systems have always undergone political reform; since the late 1990s, though, the rate of intended change has accelerated to unprecedented levels, largely on the shoulders of two key developments: the Bologna Declaration (1999), whose objective is to make the European higher education systems more competitive and attractive and the EU's Lisbon Strategy (2000), which seeks to reform the continent's still fragmented higher education systems into a more powerful and more integrated, knowledge-based economy. The EU's Modernization Agenda (2007) highlights education, research, innovation and the modernization of higher education institutions as important pillars of the Lisbon Strategy (Enders et al., 2011).

It is also proper to mention here that IE lately has been placed at the core of debates on social equality, social justice, and by extent on human rights (Banks, 1999; Hansen, 1998; Tiedt and Tiedt, 2002; Zembylas and Iasonos, 2010). Secondly, IE is connected with the concept of multiculturalism which has been enormously debated as a political doctrine. The general tonality of the academic and political discourse on multiculturalism is colored with emotional wordings like "it failed", "was misconception", "needed rethinking", and "suffered considerable political damage" (Meer and Modood, 2012). "Academic and public debates go through cycles, and one of the current fashions is to defend a (new, innovative, realistic) "interculturalism" against a (tired, discredited, naive) "multiculturalism". But there is very little intellectual substance underlying this fad. It is not based on a careful conceptual analysis of the principles... of the two approaches, but it rather rests on misinterpretation, even caricature of multiculturalist theories" (Kymlicka, 2012). Another

weighty promoter of multiculturalism Wieviorka (2012) argued that concept of multiculturalism should be redefined and certainly not replaced by the extremely vague term of interculturalism. Reviewing the international authorities' documents in this regards, it was found that in UNESCO "World Report on Cultural Diversity" and in the Council of Europe "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue", both issued in 2008, it had been declared about the need to shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism. However, the disputes on multiculturalism/interculturalism have no major impact on educational policies of different European countries. In contrast, different countries continue to cherish their own traditions in curricula as regards to the treatment of multicultural diversity of the academic environment. Hence it will be fair to point out, that education policies and education systems themselves mostly evolve due to the national priorities and strategies, traditions and potential.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the policies and instruments undertaken by the EU bodies relevant to the higher education goals in regard to educating young people capable to face the cultural diversity of modern societies. The research is aimed to examine the content of the major policy-related documents of the European supranational bodies published within the last two decades as well as initiatives and actions in order to study how they address the problematic of implementing IE at higher education.

## **II. European Educational Policies in the Rise of Intercultural Education in Higher Education**

A variety of political, economic, social and ideological forces shaped and continue to shape the formation and outcome of public educational policies nationally and internationally. Educational policies also reflect a state or nation's political, economic and social priorities, perspectives and practices (Hajisoteriou, 2010). The EU educational policies serve as an orientation and a guidance for the European countries for the development of their own national education policies.

One of the principal characteristics of the educational policies is that they are value driven and interact with the policies formed in other fields. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that policies are by nature “dynamic and interactive and not merely a set of instructions or intentions”. Educational policy is a public policy which is traditionally defined as a position in response to an issue or problem, or as a course of action to deal with an issue or problem (Lucey, Agnello and Hawkins, 2010).

Current understandings view educational public policy making as both a process and product that undergoes continuous revisions and processes of implementation (Bridges and Watts, 2008; Hajisoterious, 2010; Levinson, Sutton and Winstead, 2009). In this manner, the development of educational policies is a “two-way interactive, top-down and bottom-up approach” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). They describe future sceneries and strategically foresee a set of actions to bring these sceneries to realization.

Higher education comprises a significant share of European education policies. However, not many authors analyze higher education in realm of European IE policies, practices and challenges. Obviously, numerous researches and European authorities’ documents show that IE became the subject of the education policies in order to address migration-related diversity in education in late 1970s. Intercultural education discourse in higher education was introduced in European education policies agenda in the late 1990s. Here, it should be emphasized that all European countries have considerable autonomy in the field of education and develop their own national education policies. Hence, the EU transnational policies and initiatives may therefore serve mainly to guide and complement national level policies. One of the good examples of such initiatives is Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC is an EU policy-making process, or regulatory instrument, formally initiated by the Lisbon European Council in 2000. The OMC does not result in EU legislation, but is a method of soft governance which aims to spread best practice and achieve convergence towards EU goals in those policy areas which fall under the partial or full competence of Member States. Since binding EU rules cannot be used as the means to achieve convergence among Member States in such cases, OMC relies on other mechanisms. The Open Method of Coordination was established as an intra-European

means of governance through which the EU identifies common challenges across member-states, pinpoints best practices and encourages countries to review their existing national policies (Alexiadou et al., 2010).

The last decades are marked as very decisive for IE in connection with the attention to this phenomenon from the side of the world authorities. This is manifested through the production of joint recommendations, declarations and frameworks (UNESCO), policy briefs, reports and cross-national survey studies (e.g. OECD), or communications, conclusions and resolutions (e.g., the EU).

The year 2006 for IE is distinguished with the UNESCO's Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006), with a certain number of recurrent principles that can be identified as a guide for international action in the field of intercultural education. The guidelines stressed upon active and full participation of all learners for contributing to understanding and solidarity among individuals and ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (UNESCO, 2006).

The European Union alongside with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the World Bank and like the other major global institutions formalize and shape the policy processes and agendas including educational policy. Speaking about the application of IE at higher education, it should be stressed upon, that it is predictably connected with internationalization process.

According to the one of the most prominent advocate of internationalization of higher education, Dutch Researcher Hans de Witt (2001), at the beginning of the 21st century one had to be aware that international dimension of higher education in Europe was in initial development and characterized by:

- Institutional strategies and actions have been initiated mainly by support provided by the European Commission and - although in a more limited way - by national governments
- Private initiative and support for internationalization is almost negligible in Europe

- The role of institutional leaders in the process of internationalization has been less pro-active and more reactive than in the US
- Internationalization of higher education in Europe has been developed more on the basis of financial support by the European Commission and national governments on the basis of self-financing mechanisms, which were and, in many cases, still are absent, both at the institutional level and individual.

Further on it appeared that internationalization was first and foremost claimed as a useful means to bridge cultural differences, increase understanding between different cultures and build partnerships cross-culturally (de Wit, 2002). This is proved by the fact, that today, the majority of European Universities have become the sites of multicultural performances, done by the diversity of students—local and international, bilingual and monolingual, religious and nonreligious, majority and minority groups which makes higher education institutions work as much as against cultural, social, economic, political and linguistic differences. The university classrooms today are culturally diverse also thanks to international students and lecturers who increase the intercultural environment at the institutional level.

The European higher education landscape has been transformed during the past decade due to the great number of national reforms. Over the years there have been remarkable improvements often thanks to reforms and modernization strategies implemented by European higher education institutions; programs offered to mobile students non-mobile students at both academic and non-academic levels, including counseling services, language training, and courses provided through the medium of English. However, these do not seem to include intercultural academic offers at the regular basis. In universities across Europe, there are a few courses relating to Ethnicity, Religion and Intercultural Dialogue on Bachelor's level (Horga,2011). Better situation is with Intercultural Studies as the academic offer at Master's level. London School of Economics, Freie University Berlin (Germany), Verona University, Trento University (Italy), University of Nicosia (Cyprus),

Mediation Siauliai University (Lithuania) are among the well-known in Intercultural Studies at postgraduate level.

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The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy are the key drivers for this reform movement, and they include an array of stakeholders: students, institutions, the private sector, national governments and the European Union (de Witt, 2005). Van de Weder (2003) extends this statement saying that The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy are the main vehicles or frameworks guiding the European response to globalization in higher education. Although they emerged in very different ways (bottom-up versus top-down), and thus have some different patterns and origins of ownership, and could be characterized as intergovernmental (Bologna) versus supra-national (Lisbon), they seem to converge slowly into one overarching approach.

Speaking about the European educational policy in higher education it is quite logic to talk about the Bologna Process as one of the most ambitious attempts in history at reforming European higher education and may potentially facilitate the withering away of the lines of

demarcation between the nation state and the supranational community in education policy (Neave 2003).

Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999, so far has united voluntarily 47 signatory countries from the EU and beyond. Though national policies of the European countries often demonstrate combinations of the various strategies, these countries agreed to modernize and structurally reform their national higher education systems and to make European higher education more competitive, improving mobility and the recognition of qualifications and reforming structures. The signatory countries must ensure that they keep pace with the ambition to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Bologna Declaration states several major objectives:

- The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.
- The establishment of a system of credits—such as in the ECTS system
- The promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement for both students and teachers, researchers and staff in higher education.
- The promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- The promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

Further on the ministerial meeting were arranged regularly to monitor the reforms process years. The main goals of the Bologna process were crystallized at the follow-up meetings in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009), Romania (2012), Yerevan (2015) and Paris (2018) to serve as a driving force for setting priorities, discuss the reforms progress in the signature countries and to show what progress was made in implementing the Bologna reforms and in which areas the reformation efforts should concentrate in the coming years.

During the given period the Bologna Declaration objectives and guidelines were met without enthusiasm, oppression across Europe, the idea was criticized on behalf of the academy and policy-makers (Grove, 2012). The major concern and critics targeted the idea that the Bologna process and formation of the EHEA were explicitly connected with neoliberal agenda of the European education policies. Robert Phillipson in his book “Linguistic Imperialism Continued” (2013) comments on the Ministerial press-release statement worryingly says that, according to the text: “universities should no longer be seen as a public good but should be run like businesses, should privatize, and let industry set the agenda. The new buzzwords are that degrees must be “certified” in terms of “employability” of graduates. “Accountability” no longer refers to intellectual quality or truth-seeking but means acceptability to corporate-driven neoliberalism.

However, since its initiation the Bologna Declaration idea has demonstrated its vitality and liveliness. One of the priorities of the Bologna Process is to increase the mobility of students, researchers and professors because it generates academic and cultural benefits, helps increase employability and labour market access of young people (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). The Bologna Process was inspired to a great extent by the need to stimulate both internal mobility as well as mobility from the outside of Europe into the continent thus enhancing Europe’s competitiveness (de Wit, 2012). And from this perspective the Bologna Process represents shift in higher education policy towards increasing internationalization and global competition.

Today, as the Bologna Process has reached a new level of maturity, the analysis of higher education policy themes and agendas at transnational and national levels are to be done in a more broader and systemic way including the focus on internationalization of education and the outcomes of international mobility.

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### **III. European Authoritative Institutions Promoting Intercultural Education**

European institutions have come to play an important role in national policy processes related to IE. They have urged the development of policies fostering an intercultural dimension in education (Hadjisoteriou et al., 2015).

In 2002 Council of Europe issued document “The New Challenges of Intercultural Education: Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe” specifying the religious diversity in intercultural education (Council of Europe, 2002). The Final Declaration of the 21st session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education was devoted particularly to IE. The Declaration committed the member states to the promotion of effective intercultural education, including the religious dimension, the need to re-launch conceptual research on intercultural education was stated (Athens Declaration, 2003).

In 2005, the Commission of the European Communities issued “Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for life-long learning”. The intercultural and civic competences were defined as knowledge and skills that equip individuals to participate in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary.

The European Commission is known for being one of the major stakeholders of the reformation process of higher education in European countries, also plays crucial role in the development of internationalization of higher education. The European Commission has long been interested in employing education-related policies in order to promote a sense of European identity amongst Europeans and to strengthen public support for European integration (Petit, 2007 in Sigalas, 2010). European Commission has promoted IE actively through various initiatives which were successfully extended across European countries. Intercultural experiences are the integral part of the many mobility initiatives the Commission promotes and facilitates, first of all for university students. Beginning with ERASMUS program (1987), the initiative to stimulate academic mobility at the level of individual academics and students, gradually developed through the SOCRATES program (1996) into an effort in which the curriculum and the institutional level were included.

While the programme agenda was strongly focused on the intra-European cooperation, the activities underwent a substantial geographic expansion with an accent of the European integration process. The rationales for these scholarly exchange activities were seen as mainly academic and cultural. With the ERASMUS programme, the international dimension, already present in research, also entered education in a systematic way (Laureys, 1992 in de Witt, 2001).

During the last 30-year period, more than 3 million of the ERASMUS program participants studied, trained, taught, or volunteered in another country. They proved that intercultural competence is a necessary prerequisite for their success both in professional and personal life. The “Erasmus generation” as a concept has been introduced and coined. Numerous surveys, conducted regularly, show that persons who have taken part in Erasmus mobility program have much better chances on the labour market, not least because of their international experience and intercultural competences. In times of globalization, such qualities are bound to become even more valuable.

In the most recent version of the Erasmus programme guide it is emphasized that international mobility of higher education students and staff should “raise participants” awareness and understanding of other cultures and countries, offering them the opportunity to build networks of international contacts, to actively participate in society and develop a sense of European citizenship and identity’ (European Commission, 2012). This clearly shows that from a European policy perspective, it is expected that a sense of European citizenship and identity can be fostered by bringing young Europeans together (Van Mol, 2018).

In 2001, the European Commission in its report referred to the problems of internationalization of higher education in European countries and stressed the need to attract more students from other regions to the European Union. This resulted in establishment of the ERASMUS MUNDUS program (2004-2016). This program included a global scholarship scheme for third-country nationals, and was based on HEIs international cooperation network.

The European Parliament through its activities in numerous documents has emphasized the importance of the academic and student mobility in regard to formation of the intercultural competences.

The number of Declarations and Resolutions were issued that focus on education and youth, linking opportunities for mobility with education of the highest quality leading to cultural, social and economic development.

In the European Parliament Resolution of 19 January 2016 on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values (2015/2139(INI)) it is stated that European Parliament believes that, where appropriate, incorporating educational mobility as part of higher education and vocational training programmes could be beneficial for both students' personal and career development and the promotion of intercultural understanding ... whereas the development of learning mobility for students and teachers and any other form of international exchange can lead to a better world, in which people move freely and enjoy open intercultural dialogue. The European Parliament also expresses its support of the mobility of young people and teachers as well as all forms of cooperation between universities, for example common educational platforms, joint study programmes and joint projects, as a means to foster understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and to provide young people with social, civic and intercultural competences and skills. The Pillar European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2017 on the future of the Erasmus+ programme (2017/2740(RSP)) states, that the European Parliament believes that the Erasmus+ programme: "...can support the development of skills and key competences for personal, social and professional fulfillment, which goes together with the promotion of democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and the integration of migrants and refugees in enabling a wider intercultural dialogue.... It firmly believes that the Erasmus+ programme should continue to stimulate active citizenship, civic education and intercultural understanding and develop a sense of European identity...".

The principles of interculturally-informed pedagogy find the support in the Council of Europe's (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The purpose

of the Council's Framework of Reference is to provide common learning, teaching and assessment guidelines for language instruction across Europe. 'Intercultural awareness' and 'intercultural skills' are listed as learner competencies in the document. The emphasis on culture is seen in the following quotations:

Learners need to develop an awareness of 'regional and social diversity in both worlds' and view these in the context of other cultures (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 103).

Competences in one language are enhanced by knowledge of another, thus generally increasing knowledge, skills and understanding. All of these acquired competences should lead to personal enrichment and 'an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 43).

The issues of IE at higher education were also regularly included in the agenda of the European Ministers' of Education meetings. In 2000, at the Standing Conference in Cracow the European Ministers of Education adopted the Declaration addressing the citizens and the Council of Europe. The Declaration highlighted and validated the mission of higher education in the development of democratic society, one presupposing high standards as regards accessibility, equal opportunity, professionalism, international-mindedness and development of a participatory and tolerant spirit. In the document it was emphasized that the Education for democratic citizenship is based on a multifaceted and process-focused approach is achieved through multiple, interconnected, transversal learning approaches, for example through civic education, human rights education, IE, education for peace and global understanding and media education; as well as foster communication between different ethnic groups in a multicultural setting; developing actions aiming to reinforce the role of higher education in citizenship and human rights education as well as in respect of cultural and linguistic diversity.

In 2003, Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education held in Athens, Greece, 10-12 November 2003 was dedicated to 21st session - "Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy". At the Conference it was recognized the role of intercultural education and the major contribution of the Council of Europe in maintaining

and developing the unity and diversity of our European societies; the launch of the project “the new intercultural challenge to education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe”, which will make a major contribution to the shared goals of mutual understanding, respect, and learning to live together; the programme on the strategies and initiatives aimed at learning democracy, pursued in conjunction with higher education institutions, and concerned with the Bologna Process; to focus its work programme on enhancing the quality of education as a response to the challenges posed by the diversity of our societies by making democracy learning and IE key components of educational reform; encourage the member states to introduce the intercultural dimension in their education policies, in order to enable appropriate consideration of dialogue between cultures.

The role of educational policies was at the agenda of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education: “Building a more humane and inclusive Europe: role of education policies” in Istanbul, Turkey, 4-5 May 2007. At the conference it was emphasized the values and functions of higher education in modern society as well as the ability of higher education and its graduates to address major issues, such as sustainability, democratic culture, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue. The ministers decided to focus its work programme on enhancing the quality of education as a response to the challenges posed by the diversity of our societies by making education for democracy and IE key components of educational reform; In the field of IE, religious diversity and dialogue in Europe. In the conference Declaration it was reaffirmed the importance of measures to promote a better understanding between cultural and/or religious communities through school education, on the basis of shared principles of ethics and democratic citizenship; promoting intercultural dialogue on the basis of the Faro Declaration, adopted in 2005, as a means of strengthening intercultural skills and improving the management of cultural diversity in order to address the intercultural challenges that exist within European societies.

Following discussions at the Conference in Istanbul, it was decided to look at the possibility of creating a Council of Europe “Label for Intercultural Education”. This label would recognize and highlight innovative and effective initiatives in the member states in the field of IE, as a realistic means of concerted action to promote intercultural understanding and

awareness. This was considered a particularly timely contribution to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 (Huber and Brotto, 2012). Thus, the EU authoritative institutions, known to influence on policy processes at transnational and national levels, promote intercultural goals such as equality, social inclusion and human rights in modern cultural diverse society via education. Nevertheless, numerous researches point at still existing gap between EU policy rhetoric and practices across EU member states.

#### **IV. European Programs Promoting Intercultural Education**

The European programmes are considered to be important facilitators to internationalize higher education in Europe and beyond.

One of the most famous TEMPUS program was established in 1990 for the most balanced cooperation and improvement of higher education in the EU Member States and Partner Countries including countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. The programme through 1993-2007 promoted institutional cooperation between the EU and Partner Countries and focused on the reform and modernization of higher education systems in the Partner Countries. One of the specific objectives of the Tempus IV programme was to build capacity of the higher education systems to internationalise, to develop human resources, enhance mutual understanding between people and cultures and promote cooperation and networking within the regions covered by the programme and to promote intercultural dialogue between partners. In terms of policy reforms or institutional change related to internationalization, the main indicators include: incorporating internationalization into the University's mission statement; adopting new international targets, such as international student or faculty recruitment; creating new leadership posts like Vice-Rector for International Development; or setting up new international departments to manage and take forward internationalization.

Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020) – in addition to the private

investment that this money will attract. It promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market. International cooperation is a cross-cutting priority of Horizon 2020 following the EU's strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation. In short, this Societal Challenge of the Horizon 2020 programme aims at fostering a greater understanding of Europe, by providing solutions and support inclusive, innovative and reflective European societies with an innovative public sector in a context of unprecedented transformations and growing global interdependencies. The current SC6 Work Programme 2016-2017 tackles four major challenges currently faced by the European Union, namely: better understanding of Europe's cultural and social diversity and of its past will inform the reflection about present problems and help to find solutions for shaping Europe's future.

Intercultural learning is not limited to the educational setting, the Council of Europe, through its various programs has devoted considerable effort to the field of IE at tertiary level, supporting projects on cultural diversity and intercultural awareness.

At European Union level, the YOUTH Programme is one of the most relevant to youth organizations and young people. The programme promotes youth mobility within and beyond Europe. The Youth Programme objectives include developing the understanding of the cultural diversity of Europe and its fundamental common values, thus helping to promote respect for human rights and to combat racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

Specific objectives of the programme are aiming at:

- allowing young people to give free expression to their sense of solidarity in Europe and the wider world;
- supporting the fight against racism and xenophobia;
- promoting a better understanding of the diversity of our common European culture and shared heritage as well as of our common basic values:
- helping to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promoting equality at all levels of society.

SALTO Programme. As part of the European Commission's Training Strategy, SALTO-YOUTH provides non-formal learning resources for youth workers and youth leaders and organises training and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies (NAs) within the frame of the European Commission's Erasmus+ Youth programme and beyond. SALTO Resource Centres aim to improve the quality of projects by providing youth work training, contact-making activities, information and resources on specific priority areas to users of the Youth Programme including cultural diversity problematic.

As it was mentioned earlier only limited number of migrants are enrolled in higher education institutions across European Universities due to their low academic records from secondary school. One of the reason for that as rightly stated by Otten (2003): "... if students in the primary and secondary educational systems are not properly trained or prepared, it will be no surprise to see little ethnic diversity, especially immigrant minorities in higher education institutions in many countries across Europe." However, according to the Article 28 (1) of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Member States are to "make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means" (OHCHR, 2016). Access to and transition into vocational, higher and adult education is related to the age at which compulsory education ends, the recognition of educational attainments from the countries of origin, language requirements, and the policy goals regarding professional opportunities for refugees, related information and support mechanisms. But, as the diversity in today's Europe is complex and super-diversified, the goals of 'equal access' or 'non-discrimination' contained in policy documents are vague and non-specific. Instead of generalisations, we recommend that the documents set out in detail the problems of access and discrimination as they relate to specific groups (Lähdesmäki and Wagener, 2015).

It needs to be emphasized that European Commission initiated numerous granted programs on supplementing and enhancing the schooling practices on minority and migrant students' inclusion. To list a few: European Policy Network SIRIUS aimed at educating people with a migrant background. EURYDICE Network provides education institutions and

organizations with the guidance and good practices on how to tailor the provision of education for migrants. The Horizon2020 programme has a certain section of projects dedicated to migrant education and their integration. In October 2016 the new Call of Erasmus+ Programme with over Euro2 billion directed a special focus on encouraging projects that support social inclusion, notably of refugees and migrants, as well as projects that prevent radicalization.

The above mentioned European programmes are the examples of the European authorities initiatives within the activities and cooperation with the European Commission and national agencies in order to develop and promote the exchange of best practices regarding IE. The European programmes listed here aim to increase respect and familiarity with other cultures, while promoting intercultural competences, openness and intercultural understanding.

## **V. European International Organizations Promoting Intercultural Learning and Competences**

Numerous organizations declare in their mission the intention to tackle the problems of coexistence of the representatives of different cultures and necessity of training young people the intercultural competences. The following organizations can be mentioned here: The European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL, <https://efil.afs.org>) promotes a broad understanding of culture, intercultural competence and learning, in line with updated academic discourse and current political processes. EFIL makes research and holds seminars and issues the materials on development of intercultural learning at educational establishments of different levels. EFIL arranges events with the support of the European Youth Foundation and European Youth Center of the Council of Europe, like holding the seminars to test the methodology and to assemble the creativity and experience of a wider intercultural network. It also offers a number of services to education institutions interested

in intercultural learning, global education in order to prepare students for living in wider Europe and globalized world.

The International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE, [www.iaie.org](http://www.iaie.org)) since 1984 has brought together professional educators interested in diversity and equity issues in education. This includes intercultural education, multi-cultural education, anti-racist education, human rights education, active citizenship, inclusive education, conflict-resolution, bilingual and multilingualism issues, etc. The IAIE publishes the academic journal “Intercultural Education”. It also organizes annual conferences, seminars for pre-service and in-service teachers, participates in international projects, and conducts project evaluation. One of the main aims of the IAIE includes promoting information, knowledge and materials about all relevant issues concerning education in multicultural societies amongst teachers, teacher trainers, and professionals working in curriculum development, research and educational policy.

The European Association for International Education (EAIE, [www.eaie.org](http://www.eaie.org)) Founded in 1989, the EAIE is the European center for expertise, networking and resources in the internationalization of higher education. It is a non-profit, member-led organization serving individuals actively involved in the internationalization of their institutions through a combination of training, conferences and knowledge acquisition and sharing. It strives to equip academic and non-academic professionals with best practices and workable solutions to internationalization challenges and provide a platform for strategic exchange. The EAIE Academy offers academic from the educational institutions all over the world the complete mix of training opportunities in credential evaluation, marketing and recruitment, management, intercultural communication, student services, policy, strategy and more.

The Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR, [www.sietar.org](http://www.sietar.org)) SIETAR Europa was founded in 1991 in an effort to establish closer links between interculturalists within the continent. Since then national organizations have been formed in Europe, and today SIETAR Europa is, on the one hand, an umbrella organization for the European SIETARs, and, on the other, unites intercultural academics and practitioners all over the world. The purpose of the organization is to encourage the development and

application of knowledge, values and skills which enable effective intercultural and interethnic relations at individual, group, organization and community levels. SIETAR Europa serves as a forum for exchange among national SIETAR organizations and supports the establishment and development of new national SIETAR organizations. SIETAR subscribes to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and works towards the elimination of every kind of discrimination based on race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, family and marital status, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The European Network for Intercultural Education Activities (ENIEDA, <http://www.enieda.eu/>) is a collaborative academic network exploring innovative initiatives that promote the values of plurilingualism, democratic citizenship and intercultural cooperation. Having initially focused on the European model of pluralistic society, its policies, practices and perspectives ENIEDA's activities have now expanded both in geographical and disciplinary terms. ENIEDA teams are committed to fostering best practice in linguistic and IE and academic networking across all boundaries – regional, cultural, scholarly, disciplinary.

The International Association of Universities (IAU, [www.iau.org](http://www.iau.org)) in 2005 revealed a survey that higher education institutions and associations from 95 countries considered internationalization as the priority of their strategic development and is vital for the future development of their institutions. IAU regularly issued strategic documents and policy papers on internationalization of higher education. Most of the materials not least emphasize the intercultural dimension of internationalization. In “Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action” (2012) it was stated about “... highly positive intellectual and intercultural benefits that international students bring to the classroom, campus, and communities in which they study and live. The necessity to respond “... to new internationalization challenges through international dialogue that combines consideration of fundamental values with the search for practical

solutions to facilitate interaction between higher education institutions across borders and cultures while respecting and promoting diversity” was pointed out.

The abovementioned organizations serve to supplement the formal education goals in providing more opportunities to train the intercultural competences and skills through their activities and performances.

Though not much seen the contribution into internationalization of higher education and development of the intercultural competences of academics and students of the well-known European Associations in EHEA which activities are connected and covered higher education, such of the Education International (EI); European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); European Students Union (ESU); European University Association (EUA); European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). Unfortunately among the major strands and principal activities of the abovementioned organizations there is either scarce or no information found about the activities targeted at IE in higher education.

## **VI. Conclusions**

During the last decades the EU transnational education policies have demonstrated a greater emphasis of the importance of IE in higher education. Those efforts have been directed towards strengthening to social cohesion, challenging social exclusion and inequality, and developing human capital. Most European states have launched the corresponding policy steps, and most of them at least proclaim the importance of intercultural awareness, competences and skills among citizens. However, Intercultural awareness, understanding and competences have not become yet a reality. Intercultural teaching and learning at the level of tertiary education still remains the challenge, and most the European HEIs have to recognize it among the priorities.

The EU authorities play an important role in initiating or encouraging reforms on IE across national education systems in order to help children, young people and adults become

capable for living and working in culturally diverse societies. The EU authorities through the education policies endorse that IE should continue to be articulated in higher education across Europe. It is evident the increased role of various types of actors and stakeholders involved in the IE policy formation and implementation, as well as a stronger alliance between different educational sectors and policy-making bodies has been proved to be efficient. The international organizations have become more relevant in national policy-making processes, which entailed more grounded support for IE.

The numerous researches indicate various reforms in higher education focusing at development of intercultural awareness and competences of academics and students. The increased amount of researches was produced in the field European education policies through intercultural lenses. However, numerous researchers report about significant gap in the national level what government expects regarding IE and how this type of education is implemented; between the legislative bodies and policy-making structures; between legislation, policy and implementation. There is a weak relationship between theory, official policy-making and practice, realization of this policy at institutional levels (Tsaliki, 2013, p. 220). Needless to say that many researchers indicate most of the EU official documents are of the manifestation-like and declarative character, demonstrating the appliance of soft law strategy mostly.

Intercultural teaching, learning and extracurricular activities within higher education is directly connected with internationalization efforts of the universities, though there are scarce high officials statements in modern political discourse which identify intercultural awareness and competence as one of the ultimate goals of internationalization. International mobility is considered one of the most efficient instruments for academia and students to gain intercultural awareness and competences. The EU initiative “Erasmus Programme” for more than 30 years has served to encourage and financially support academics and students for a short/long term international teaching/learning experience. The abundant EU authorities’ reviews and reports have indicated high level of raising intercultural awareness and gaining intercultural competences of the Erasmus programme participants. However the research, analyses and surveys made from interdisciplinary perspectives, made by

reputable scholars indicate that short-term international mobility is not enough for intercultural learning as it is a life-long learning process, and intercultural competence can never be fully achieved (Deardorff, 2006, 2012).

The EC funded initiatives and programmes, though being highly appreciated by academia and civil sector in education, nevertheless need to pursue the sustainability across Europe and especially in partner countries.

The major socio-political changes in combination of linguistic and cultural difference which occur in European countries will inevitably stimulate debates about the validity of the intercultural learning within the higher education system. The debates and discussions of the issue of educating “*persona interculturale*” within the university studies need to persist and cover such issues as humanity, tolerance, acceptance of otherness, and respect of human rights. It is also needed the revision of the framework of higher education (for example educational objectives, values, attitudes and competencies) and the ways in which they are to be put into practice in intercultural teaching and learning. Need for intercultural competence has been articulated in the official documents but in practice it largely remains to be seen and applied mostly in international business education contexts.

The messages from politicians state out that intercultural education should not be limited to formal schooling and curricula. It should also concern to in/non formal forms of education. It should concern all society.

The EU initiated quite a number of reforms in higher education, the Bologna process has become one of the major drivers of modernization of higher education systems across Europe. However the reforms turn out to be driven by the necessity to make Europe more competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. Focus on intercultural awareness and competences is rather used as a concept in education policy. However due to the increasing cultural pluralism in European societies, current movement of people and global cultural flows the education policies should pay more attention and take into account the important role of normative intercultural chronicles in higher education.

The activities of the EU international organizations have become an important source for higher education policy change, though there is a need that policymakers be more precise and specific with culture-related concepts and better reflect increasing pluralism in Europe. The progress in developing the EU intercultural education within higher education policies is obvious, although it would be early to say about a shift towards emerging a separate intercultural education domain. The evidence-based EU policies in regards of intercultural education has a great potential to improve the quality, mechanisms of implementation, investment in development and dissemination of best practices and efficient policies in higher education across Europe.

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