

## Conference Paper

# Adult Education Policies in EU: In-Depth Insight on their Contribution to Social Cohesion

Pantelis Sklias<sup>1</sup>, Spyros Roukanas<sup>2</sup>, and Giota Chatzimichailidou<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Peloponnese

<sup>2</sup>University of Piraeus

<sup>3</sup>University of Peloponnese

## Abstract

The objective of the present study is to investigate the European Union (EU) policies regarding Adult Education from the early fifties. It seems like Adult Education, either as an ideology or as a practice, haven't gained widespread attention by the Brussels Bureaucrats, as a result, the first interests in concepts of Adult Education had begun, only, in 2000. While Lifelong Learning involves both vocational and non-vocational education, policymakers seemed to be preoccupied by an extensive interest to meet the needs of European labour market, so they have paid much effort to promote Vocational Education and Training instead of Adult Education. The possible contribution of Adult Education policies to strengthen social cohesion is another issue we attempt to explain. Were EU policies for Adult Education a step in this direction so far or not?

**Keywords:** Adult Education, social cohesion, Adult Education policies in EU

Corresponding Author:  
 Pantelis Sklias, Spyros  
 Roukanas, and Giota  
 Chatzimichailidou; email:  
 psklia@hotmail.com

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## 1. Introduction

The bibliography used, provides evidence that EU policy statements from 1950 onwards not only spend more attention to Vocational Training than to Adult Education but also promote it more. The reason that the EU heavily promotes the first is its concern regarding unemployment in the knowledge economy. This obviously implies a reductionist concept of Adult Education. Policies to enhance European social cohesion through Adult Education and Lifelong Learning seemed to appear only in the 2000s, whereas economic crisis, begun in 2007, seemed to diminish that interest for the sake of an employment orientation of those policies. According to Prokou (2014, 37) the EU policies in Lifelong Learning are consistent with a clear shift from the emancipatory-utopian or social justice concept to a market-oriented model with a primary objective of making continuous training and learning of workers a requirement for employability. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows into five sections: Section II analyses the EU policies affecting Adult Education from 1950 onwards. Section III discusses the correlation between Adult Education policies and social cohesion. Finally, Section V summarizes the results of this paper and draws conclusions.

## 2. EU Policies Affecting Adult Education from 1950 Onwards.

In the following paragraphs we will strive to unfold the history span of the established EU policy statements the aforementioned period. The aim of this historical review is to elucidate whether references for Adult Education policies exist. Prior to this analysis, we will discuss the definitions of terms used in this paper.

### 2.1. Defining Terms

In our previous paper we have raised the term issue, as there is obviously a variety of definitions, not only across several studies, but also across countries. The literature reveals that many studies use the term 'Lifelong Learning' and others the terms 'Vocational Education and Training' and 'Adult Education' [42]. For the needs of this paper we will focus on the latter term. ([29], 12-16) classified three periods in developing the concept of Adult Education:

1. 1946 – 1958: The first period represents two major features: the need to reconstruct the educational structures affected by WWII and the interest to promote free, obligatory and universal education through complete educational programs.
2. 1960 - 1976: This period signals the beginning of a more explicit discourse about defining and unifying the term Lifelong Education, which is used for the first time at the beginning of this period, with the term Adult Education. With the introduction of this term, Adult Education incorporated in Lifelong Education.
3. 1980 - ...: The third period was framed under the 1976 Recommendation, during which the term Lifelong Education gains a catholicity as it is expanded with two significant additions: the first in 1983 with the addition "for all" and the second in 1995 with the addition "learning without frontiers".

In this paper we argue that Adult Education denotes the entire body of organized educational processes within the framework on non-formal education. The latter term established in 1973 by Coombs and Ahmed, according to which non-formal education refers to any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system [37]. Adult Education covers the lifespan after the cessation of formal education, and serves both as a means of personal betterment and economic development [42]. It is oriented at any age within adulthood and spotlights the ability of every adult to freely involve in educational processes. We identify as adult every person who is considered as adult by the society he belongs, and holds the ability to construe meaning upon his experiences, to possibly revise some interpretations in order to plan future actions and therefore to modify erroneous patterns or adopt new ones.

## 2.2. Early Developments

After WWII Europe was caught in a condition of chaos, ruined, destitute and exhausted [2, 31, 38]. That condition increased the need for cooperation in political, economic and military fields. All over Western Europe had revived the hopes for the unification of Europe, a concept rather not new. From the Roman Empire through Charlemagne, Napoleon and Hitler, there is a long history of attempts for some kind of a united Europe [38]. In [40] points out that 'The "uniting of Europe" neither started from scratch nor was its future course foreseen'. In the late forties and early fifties, these attempts had gained a catholicity in Western Europe. On September 9, 1946, [5] formed the bedrock of the discussion for the United States of Europe in his speech in the University of Zurich.

The restoration of peace was followed by a two decade period of unrestrained pursuit of economic growth [31, 47], an aberration from the stagnation and gloominess of the previous years. This had an obvious economic effect. According to Holtrop ([27], 1) during the period 1948-1957 the average volume of the national product per head of the population in Western Europe was far exceed than in the United States, which represented a yearly rate of growth of 4.5 per cent for the first, against one of 2 per cent for the latter. In this study we consider that Adult Education could strengthen the process of unification of Europe through the strengthening of social cohesion. Along similar lines, as ([46], 452) argue instruments of knowledge conceived within the context of Europe's Lifelong Learning are an important part of unification.

## 2.3. EU Policy Framework for Adult Education

For the needs of this analysis we classify EU policies for Adult Education in three periods, on the basis of Hubert Ertl's classification: the pre-Maastricht phase, the post-Maastricht phase and the post-Lisbon phase [17].

### 2.3.1. The Pre-Maastricht Phase

As of 1950 the Treaty of European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was signed in Paris on 18 April 1951 with a validity period limited to 50 years. Among its principles were to boost the readjustment of the workers who have been affected adversely by the competition (Capelle, 1963, 48). The Treaties of Rome, signed on 25 March 1957, are the legal basis upon whom rest two Treaties: The Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty, 1957) and the European Atomic Energy Community (The Euratom Treaty Consolidated Version, 2010m). Due to the lack of reference to education in EEC Treaty, cooperation in this field depended on the political will of the member states [36]. According to ([17], 6) none of these Treaties make any specific mention of general education, while Vocational Training is mentioned in a few number of Articles: ECSC Article 56, Euratom, Articles 7 and 9, EEC Articles 41, 50, 118 and 128. In the same direction was the European Council's Decision 63/226 of 2 April 1963, contained 10 general principles for setting up a common policy for Vocational Training

to give all people the opportunity to receive adequate training in order to exercise free choice of occupation and place of work, and to reach new and higher levels of employment [17].

On 16 November 1971 ministers for education met for the first time at Community level and adopted a resolution approved on an intergovernmental basis, to deal educational problems at a national level, vocational training among them [34]. A few months later, in July 1972, European Commission asked Professor Henri Janne, Former Belgian Minister of Education, Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Institute of Sociology and of the Institute of European Studies of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, to formulate the first principles of an education policy at Community level. The Report entitled 'For a Community Policy in Education', also known as 'Janne Report'. According to ([17], 8) Janne Report, clearly stated the division of general and vocational education, influenced the discussion in the field of education. Oil crisis of 1973 set the principles for a further discussion about youth unemployment. Vocational Training gained a more significant role at the Community level, due to the recognition of the fact that many young people entered the labour market with no qualifications after leaving school at the age of 16 or under [17]. As highlighted by Neave [17] 'The concept of 'vocationalization' began to determine the agenda of education policy at the Commission level'. In 1974 a Council Resolution established the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training CEDEFOP to collect and exchange information on national systems of vocational training and prepare a harmonisation of training levels [36]. In 1974 an Education Committee was set up composed of representatives of the Member States and of the Commission, to develop actions in the seven priority areas agreed upon by the ministers for education of the Community. According to ([17], 7) cooperation in the area of general education has just started. In 1975, the Council and the ministers for education meeting in the Council approved the first Community action programme on education, the resolution formally adopted by the Council on 9 February 1976, which laid the foundations for Community cooperation in the area of education and contained six priority areas for action: education of the children of migrant workers, closer relations between education systems in Europe, compilation of documentation and statistics, higher education, teaching of foreign languages, and equal opportunities [34]. Until then, all references in EU documents were occupied by Vocational Training. A further significance notice indicates that even the focus of funding was on Vocational Training: in 1984, 75% of the European Social Fund was used to help young people to enter the workforce and also to promote an exchange programme for young workers [34].

### 2.3.2. The Post Maastricht Phase

The Treaty on European Union [45], also known as 'Maastricht Treaty', opens the way to political integration and creates a European Union. With this Treaty, the European Economic Community becomes the European Community (EC). According to ([36], 19),

prior to the TEU, cooperation on education had no legal basis in the European community. Whereas there is no reference to Adult Education, there is provision to further promote Vocational Training (Articles 123, 127). One possible explanation could be that policy makers equated Adult Education with Vocational Training. The role of the Community was focused on encouraging cooperation between member states, by supporting and implementing their action (Article 126). In the meanwhile, there is distinct reference to distance education in Article 126, paragraph 2. In this Treaty there is also provision to the strengthening of social cohesion (Article 130a, 130b). Moreover, it introduces the concept of European citizenship, which is stated as one of Union's objectives 'to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union' (Article B). Vocational Training would target to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market.

In 1993 the Commission of the European Communities released the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment [6]. Commission underlined the importance of lifelong education and training among the priorities for action on jobs and invited national educational communities to make their own contributions towards universally accessible advanced vocational training [6]. Investment in education and training is linked to competitiveness, employment and social cohesion. Distinct reference is made to its contribution to meet the needs of European industry, as a result of the increased level of skills required to use new technologies effectively. This White Paper set out to promote the European Year of Lifelong Learning -1996- established with European Parliament and Council Decision n° 95/2493/EC, of 23 October 1995. These provisions are consistent to the conclusions of the Cannes European Council of June 1995 [4] on the importance of the investment on training to improving competitiveness and employment. On 30 November 1995, the European Commission presented the White Paper on 'Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society' [7]. Besides Commission's main concern to stem the rise of unemployment in Europe, it is important that for the first time provisions for the informal education are made 'Education and training whether acquired in the formal education system, on the job or in a more informal way, is the key for everyone to controlling their future and their personal development'. Selfawareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment are the main elements of personal development. Lifelong learning is a reference point in this White Paper, as it is seen as a response to the radical increase of life expectancy, which at the same time changes the age structure of the population. The long term implications of the focus on Vocational training for improving employment and competitiveness are becoming a matter of attention. Griffin (1999, 435) notes that the policy objective of lifelong learning remains that of economic growth, increased productivity and competitiveness. As a matter of fact, this introduces 'a reductionist model of lifelong learning as a form of progressive and redistributive education policy, in global market conditions, and from the perspective of the industrialized countries of the world as they move through the postindustrial era' (Griffin, 1999).

According to ([21], 5) the European Parliament and the Council endorsed the view that Lifelong Learning is as much a matter of personal fulfilment and being enabled

to participate in the exercise of the rights of citizenship as it is a matter of attaining economic objectives, set out to promote the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Moreover, he clarifies that this does not mean that educational values are subordinated to considerations of industrial competitiveness, notwithstanding the damage to social cohesion caused by unemployment, especially youth and long-term ([21], 5). A wide range of events were organized to promote the concept of Lifelong Learning. The main limitation is that Adult Education has not been considered yet as a distinct policy matter. Mohorčič Špolar and ([26], 39) are quite skeptical about the outcomes of the European Year of Lifelong Learning as 'There is room for debate as to how far the member states endorsed the idea of lifelong learning, but they most certainly embraced the funds which the Year of Lifelong Learning brought'. ([36], 20) raises several concerns about the reluctance of the Member States to include social partners and associations in consultations, a reality which became more widespread after 2000. It was only in 1999 that EU established contact with an association for Adult Education, the European Association for the Education of Adults, EAEA.

### 2.3.3. The Post-Lisbon Phase

On 23-24 March 2000, the Lisbon European Council agreed a new strategic goal for the Union in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy 'The Union has today set itself a new strategic goal for the next decade: 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' [28]. Promoting Lifelong Learning is seen as one of the four key areas addressed by the Council and Commission. A few months later on 19 and 20 June, Santa Maria Da Feira European Council has taken a number of important steps aimed at addressing the challenges confronting it in the immediate future [39]. The conclusions of the European Council confirm a dual target: to prepare the transition to a competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy and to modernize the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state. As stated in Paragraph 33 'Lifelong learning is an essential policy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion and employment'. The Council and the Commission invite Member States 'to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all to promote the involvement of social partners, to harness the full potential of public and private financing, and to make higher education more accessible to more people as part of a lifelong learning strategy'.

On 30 October 2000, the Commission presented a working paper under the title 'A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning' [8]. It set out the goal to launch a European-wide debate on a comprehensive strategy for implementing Lifelong Learning at individual and institutional levels, and in all spheres of public and private life [8] and presented a few examples of "good practice" in order to illustrate innovative and flexible approaches for the citizens and other partners to putting lifelong learning into practice [8]. According to Mohorčič Špolar and Holford (2014, 39) the EU's view



has not always been so narrow: the Memorandum stressed lifelong learning's role in social cohesion, active citizenship and social inclusion. Lifelong Learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training, as it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. Adult Education is mentioned for the first time as distinct part in the Memorandum, called into a European cooperation 'Training courses and qualifications for education and training practitioners working in non-formal sectors (such as youth and community work), in adult education or in continuing training are underdeveloped everywhere in Europe. What can be done to improve this situation, including through European co-operation' [8]. ([26], 8) state that Adult Education first became a selfstanding policy area under the Grundtvig programme, a sub-programme that focused on Adult Education and other educational pathways. On 23 and 24 March 2001, the European Council met in Stockholm [43]. The ministers for education agreed for the first time on a set of three strategic goals and thirteen concrete objectives, which became the basis of the 'Education and training 2010' process [36]. The objectives especially relevant to Adult Education, according to the same author were: developing key competences, access to information and communications technology for everyone, creating an open learning environment, promoting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion, and strengthening links with the world of work, with research and society.

In November 2001, a Commission Communication [9] suggested to establish European area of Lifelong Learning in order to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic. The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on Lifelong Learning stressed its contribution to competitiveness and employability, but also to social cohesion, active citizenship, personal and professional fulfilment [16]. It was only in 2006 that the definition Adult Learning has become a matter of policy in a Communication from the Commission under the title 'Adult learning: It is never too late to learn' [10]. Despite the variation of definitions, Commission offers a narrow one of Adult Learning which implies 'all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training' [10]. Commission emphasizes the weak implementation of Adult Learning in changing national systems to mirror the need for learning throughout the lifespan and admits that it had not gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation and resources. On 15 November 2006, the European Parliament and the Council released a decision establishing an action programme in the field of Lifelong Learning for the period 2007-2013. The term Adult Learning is now replaced by this of Adult Education. According to Article 2, 'adult education means all forms of non-vocational adult learning, whether of a formal, non-formal or informal nature'. It is the first time that this term acquires such a narrow definition. The Commission Communication in 2007 'It is always a good time to learn' [12], focused on disadvantaged because of their low literacy levels, inadequate work skills and/or skills for successful integration into society. Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on Adult Learning has set specific measures for the period 2008-2010 [12]. The activities included, among others, support both measures and campaigns to strengthen the place of adult learning within the

context of national lifelong learning strategies and to raise awareness and motivation in order to increase overall participation in Adult Learning. Mention should be made of the use of the term Adult Education in the Council Conclusions. The Council invited the Commission to 'strengthen and use existing research structures for the needs of adult education'. Member States were invited to promote and support the exchange of good practice with stakeholders, mutual learning and the development of joint projects in the field of Adult Education and therefore to reinforce cooperation with CEDEFOP, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and other international institutions, in the area of Adult Education and Learning [12]. Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') [13] agree that the primary goal of European cooperation in the period up to 2020 should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States.

The Commission Communication 'Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' [18], is a 10 year strategy that put forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. Adult Learning provides a means to adults, especially to low-skilled and older workers, for improving their ability to adapt to changes in the labour market and society. In 2011, the Council of the European Union recognizes that all adults, included the high qualified can benefit from Lifelong Learning, especially in times of economic crisis (CEU, 2011). Later the Commission released a Communication 'Key competences for a changing world. Draft 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme' and a staff working document 'Key competences for a changing world. Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. Analysis of implementation at the European and national levels'. Among the Key Competences is that Adult Education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their key competences throughout life. The 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training [18] 'Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe' proposed new working priorities for the period 2012-2014 geared to mobilise education and training to support Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2012a). There is neither a reference to Adult Education, nor to Adult Learning in this draft. The EU's focus on investment in education and training for skills development as a means of growth and competitiveness is also found in a communication issued by the Commission in 2012 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' (European Commission, 2012b). ([36], 25) highlights that EU activity and debate has focused much on urgent economic issues due to the severe economic crisis that hit much of Europe shortly after the commencement of the Europe 2020 process. Therefore, this has made a profound impact on the priorities in education, including Adult Learning. Adult Education has been excluded again, as a matter of policy. The Council Conclusions on investing in education and training in 2013 were likewise focusing on the role of education and training as a driver for growth and competitiveness (CEU, 2013).



### 3. An Analysis of the Correlation between Adult Education Policies and Social Cohesion

Social cohesion strengthens the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as security, self-esteem, democracy, well-being and access to basic infrastructure for all citizens [42]. ([41], 55) argue that social cohesion is a characteristic of the societies as a whole, which refers to the ways in which their constituent groups or communities are linked together. In their study, they revealed many ways in which education underpins the maintenance of personal well-being and social cohesion. Rosell ([30], 13) notes 'Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community'. A cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility ([33], 17). ([25], 9) propose that social cohesion is 'The property by which whole societies, and the individuals within them, are bound together through the action of specific attitudes, behaviours, rules and institutions which rely on consensus rather than pure coercion'. The same scholars seem to be quite skeptical about whether raising levels of skills will improve aggregate social outcomes ([25], 21). Associations between education and social capital can be found in most developed countries in individual level analysis, however, due to the existence of other contextual factors, they do not necessarily hold in cross-country analysis ([22], 228). In the meanwhile, social cohesion strengthens the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as security, self-esteem, democracy, well-being and access to basic infrastructure for all citizens. Notwithstanding, we argue that this position is unlikely to achieve social prosperity for all, although there are desirable elements.

It is our strong belief that Adult Education can very much determine the identity and quality of social cohesion towards economic development [42]. Lest the reader be led astray, we do not argue that Adult Education is itself a sufficiently strong parameter to strengthen the fragments of a European cohesive society. It actually coexists with other parameters, and all of them participate effectively towards this process. The view that Adult Education should be concerned more with the continuous re-skilling of the workforce is the point we will strongly contest. The view we shall be espousing is that through Adult Education programs individual actors, citizens, will be empowered to involve in the societal evolution towards social cohesion. Transformative learning theory is such a tool i.e participant will be encouraged to develop critical views and understanding of major problems of his/hers life, to reassess, reevaluate and interpret his/hers experiences and thoughts, thus becoming closer to new ideas, people and even institutions. In the long run, and according to the bibliography used above, this process will bring a stone to the edifice of social cohesion.

Besides the vocalization of Adult Education, as analyzed in this study, there is an obvious shift from education to learning. This shift, according to Griffin (1999, 431-432) implies the abandonment of education as social policy in favour of individual

learning as government strategy. Along similar lines, ([1], 703) argue that this emphasis on learning, shifts the emphasis from the state, as a provider of services to which people are entitled, onto individuals, who must be responsible for their own learning. A concept adopted by the EU also, as its master-concept, for another reason as Borg and Mayo argue: education is regarded within the EU as a matter of national sovereignty. ([24], 63) claims that over the last third of the twentieth century, as advanced capitalism demanded a more educated, and continually educated, workforce, Adult Education, in its traditional sense, has begun to disappear and replaced by Lifelong Learning. In the meanwhile, he claims that the investment in the workforce is not necessarily for the benefit of the worker, but for the gain of the organisation [24]. Along similar lines, Colin Griffin in his study 'Lifelong Learning and Welfare reform' (1999, 431) observes that as far as the European Commission is concerned, the principle of Lifelong Learning is one of employment policies and continuous reskilling of the workforce 'The focus is strongly on training, so that it is no longer education, but learning itself, which is being incorporated into economic and employment policy'.

#### 4. Conclusion

All things considered, we intend to believe that Brussels Bureaucrats seem to be pre-occupied by an extensive interest to meet the needs of European labour market, in order to stem the rise of unemployment in Europe. Hence, since the early fifties they have paid much effort to promote Vocational Education and Training instead of Adult Education. The latter is considered more as a key driver for economic growth, competitiveness and a tool for the continuous re-skilling of the workforce. As a matter of fact, only in 2000 had begun the first interests in concepts of Adult Education, whereas at the same time appeared the first extensive policies aiming at strengthening European social cohesion through Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. Economic crisis seems to diminish the interest to promote Adult Education for the shake of an employment orientation of the EU policies. This, accordingly, implies a reductionist concept of Adult Education within EU. As explained above, individual actors, citizens, play a vital role in the evolution towards social cohesion. Further findings of this study will be presented in future papers. Considerably, more work will need to be done to determine the role of Adult Education to social cohesion.

#### 5. About the Authors

**Pantelis Sklias (1969)** is a Professor of International Political Economy (IPE) at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Peloponnese, Corinth Greece. He was also a visiting lecturer at the Department of International and European Studies of the University of Macedonia and visiting lecturer and assistant professor from 2002 to 2007 at the Department of International Economic Relations and Development of the Dimocritus University of Thrace. Since 2002, he has taught at the Hellenic Open University. From 1999 to 2002, he was a visiting research fellow at the Postgraduate Centre for Culture, Development and the Environment (CDE)

of the University of Sussex. His research interests are related to the study of the International and European political economy and governance.

**Spyros A. Roukanas (1981)** is Assistant Professor of International Political Economy at the Department of International and European Studies of the University of Piraeus. He graduated from the Department of International Economic Relations and Development of Democritus University of Thrace (2003). He was awarded his Master of Arts in International Political Economy from the University of Leeds (UK) (2004). He was awarded his Ph.D. at the Department of International Economic Relations and Development, Democritus University of Thrace (2008). He has taught as a Visiting Lecturer at Democritus University of Thrace (Department of International Economic Relations and Development, Department of Agricultural Development and Program of "Post-Graduate Courses in South-Eastern Europe Studies", Department of Law). He has also taught as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of the Aegean (Department of Financial and Management Engineering and Postgraduate Programme in: "Economics and Management for Engineers" at the Department of Financial and Management Engineering). His main research interests are in International Political Economy and economic development in the countries of Southeast Europe and emerging economies and their relations with the EU.

**Giota Chatzimichailidou (1982)** is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Peloponnese. She writes a PhD thesis with the title "The contribution of Adult Education to Economic Development". Her research interests include Adult Education, International and European Political Economy, Development and Governance.

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