

# EUROPEAN UNION POLICY IN THE FIELD OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

*The current state of our planet and life on it requires that the ideas of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility are implemented not only on the business level but also in schools and universities, since training and education drive individuals and groups to respect its principles.*

*In the first part, we deal with the ideas of the European Commission documents on further development of education and science in the common European area.*

*The second part focuses on the characteristics of a strategic document, Enterprise 2020, whose main objective is to contribute to meeting the objective of the newly adopted Europe 2020 strategy - to ensure sustainable economy of the EU. The initiative also draws attention to the involvement of academic institutions in the process, as they educate future business leaders.*

*In the third section, we present our contribution in the field of education for sustainable development through the development project whose main objective is to introduce a subject of "Sustainable corporate social responsibility".*

## Key words

*sustainable development, school and science development, education to sustainable development*

## Introduction

Wise governments all around the world know that the best investments for the future are the investments in higher education of the young generation. From the generally accessible sources of statistical offices, for example EUROSTAT, it is possible to find out how the ancient wisdom is interpreted in each country. . Significant differences between investments in education and science in different countries of the European Union as well as comparison with the developed countries of the world give a clear answer. Moreover, the current ongoing and deepening economic and debt crisis in Europe, the USA and Japan does not give much chance for a better starting point in the near future.

### **Vision and Documents of the European Commission for Further Development of Education and Science in the Common European Area**

In Europe, there are approximately 4,000 universities and institutions of higher education, some of which belonging to the best in the world. However, some were not able to keep up with the economic and social changes. **According to the latest projections, by 2020 35% of job positions will require university education.** Currently, only 26% of the active population in Europe has a university degree, which is below the USA, Japan and Canada. The new strategy for the modernization of higher education contains reforms the implementation of which will ensure the EU member states enough graduates able to contribute to innovation, economic growth and job creation.

**The objectives of the reforms are as follows:**

- *to increase the number of graduates to 40% of the active young population by 2020,*
- *to enable young people from various social classes to get a university education, while reducing the drop out of students to improve the quality and tailor practical orientation of university courses to individual needs and labour markets,*
- *to encourage and reward quality in education and science,*
- *to foster the acquisition of additional experience through the study or practice mobility and internships,*
- *to educate new scientists in order to prepare Europe for future challenges,*
- *to strengthen links between education, research and business,*
- *to ensure the effectiveness and purpose of education financing.*

Although the field of education is a matter of national governments, the EU has several instruments to support programs of modernization. They include for example a system for assessing the quality of universities across the EU, or provide information about the best university for the study anywhere in Europe. The new scheme of guarantee for loans is to help students gain the access to finance to cover the cost of master's study in another EU member state. Draft of the EU budget for the years 2014 to 2020 prepared by the European Commission includes a substantial increase in spending on education and training the youth (73 %) and research (46 %). The EU can thus help increase the level of higher education, improve curricula or make studying available for people from different social classes (1, 2).

## Education to Sustainable Development

Education and training that drive either individuals or groups to keep the principles of sustainable development (SD) is one of the basic preconditions of effective functioning of the system in real conditions. Both in the world and in Slovakia, many initiatives have been generated to meet the goal of SD education. They are successful in meeting the SD objectives and also in creating life conditions on Earth that are ensuring the same opportunities to future generations as the present generation has.

**The European Council** issued the documents such as: “**The EU Sustainable Development Strategy**” and the “**The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development**”, “**Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning**”, “**Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training -ET 2020**” and last but not least “**The "Europe 2020" strategy for growth and employment**”.

In these documents, but also in many other related ones, answers to following questions can be found (3).

*1st question: “Where should the SD education take place?”*

*2nd question: “When should the SD education and training start?”*

*3rd question: “Who should we educate and train towards SD?”*

*4th question: “How should the SD education and training carry out?”*

The final recommendations of the report “**Slovakia's success in creating the conditions for corporate social responsibility**”, published in May last year, included also the following tasks (4):

- 1. to increase awareness of all citizens about CSR and sustainable development,*
- 2. to roof CSR agenda by separate institution with its own powers, personnel accountability, funds,*
- 3. to eliminate departmental approach to CSR and SD principles implementation,*
- 4. to incorporate individual CSR and SD issues into the educational process, and it is important that the issues of CSR and SD in an appropriate form were introduced in pre-school education,*
- 5. to implement CSR and SD related subjects into educational curricula for different educational levels,*
- 6. to incorporate CSR and SD issues into all subjects - the issue of SD and CSR should gradually become an integral part of all subjects,*
- 7. to encourage businesses to attend the United Nations Global Compact and other networks that support CSR,*
- 8. to increase public awareness of CSR and sustainable development through the media,*
- 9. regularly evaluate the progress of the CSR at the national level, as well as in individual companies,*
- 10. to encourage companies to use environmental management systems (ISO 14001, EMAS and others),*
- 11. to promote the use of renewable sources in electricity,*
- 12. to increase spending on environmental protection,*
- 13. to initiate a forum of socially responsible investors.*

We presented the project of "Sustainable corporate social responsibility" as a part of achieving the objectives of the CSR and SD within the context of the aforementioned documents, the above mentioned tasks (specifically Nos 4, 5, 6) and the document "**Draft Opinion of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship**" (5), of April this year, also declare that one of the main tasks of achieving the CSR policy is further integration of CSR into education, training and research.

### ***Enterprise 2020 – Goals and Reality***

At present, in the period of continuous changes, it is necessary to consider how our planet and our lives on it will change. CSR Europe, an organization bringing together and representing the European companies, share and exchange practical experience in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR), together with the European Commission look for the answers to the questions like "How will our lifestyle, work, communication, education, using and sharing resources change over the next decade?". Just last year, 2010, the European Union, led by the European Commission and the Council issued Strategy Europe 2020, a strategy document which is the successor to the failed Lisbon Strategy.

### ***Strategy Europe 2020***

Strategy Europe 2020 was introduced with the aim to recover from the crisis and prepare the EU economy for the coming decade. The strategy has three key factors of growth that need to be implemented through specific arrangements on the EU level as well as on the national levels. One of the factors is to achieve smart growth to support knowledge, innovations, education and digital society. Another reinforcing priority is to achieve sustainable growth that is based on promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy. And finally, to achieve inclusive growth by fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion. The main objective of the strategy Europe 2020 is to ensure intelligent, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The most important aspect of how to reach the stability and sustainable growth is that companies realize that sustainability and responsibility represent the key factors of success. Companies should operate in the way contributing to well-being of society and of our planet in particular by positive business solutions. Companies should build their reputation on a culture based on the principles of transparency and integrated approach, on sustainable products and services and in particular on the proactive cooperation with their stakeholders.

By setting out and applying responsible business principles, it is possible to contribute to improved living conditions on our planet and to support its sustainability. To emphasize the sharing CSR principles in every business process, to engage various stakeholders and academic institutions to these processes, that's the core of successful strategy Europe 2020.

### ***Enterprise 2020***

On 28 October 2010, more than 400 participants from international companies, business networks, EU institutions and other European and international stakeholders gathered at the CSR Europe's Enterprise 2020 MarketPlace in Brussels. They together presented Enterprise 2020, a common initiative to solve societal challenges through collaborative action and to shape the business contribution to the Europe 2020 - strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The project or initiative is due to support the above- mentioned strategy Europe 2020 that should help overcome the recession and prepare economy of the European Union for the next decade.

Enterprise 2020 is an initiative to support businesses in building sustainable competitiveness, to strengthen cooperation between companies and their stakeholders by exploring new ways of cooperation, and to strengthen the Europe's global leadership on CSR by engaging the EU institutions and other international stakeholder.

Building on fifteen years of business practice, tools development and stakeholder dialogue, the initiative is an open invitation for new collective and shared actions to build the responsible enterprise of the future. Enterprise 2020 is built on the European Alliance for CSR initiated in 2006 by the European Commission, CSR Europe, BUSINESSEUROPE and UEAPME (the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises).

*The company of the future, Enterprise 2020, operates profitably through mainstreamed responsibility and transparency, and innovates solutions for the planet and its people, in close cooperation with all stakeholders (3).*

**Enterprise 2020 constitutes a unique platform for schools and universities** willing to cooperate with business to champion responsible management research to enhance the capacities of students and executives to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society.

The promotion of corporate responsibility is just in an initial stage in the Slovak Republic. The topic needs to be presented to a wider audience. **Academic institutions play the key role in promoting corporate responsibility, since they educate future business leaders (3).**

### **Our Benefit to Enterprise 2020**

Benefit of the above-mentioned initiative is the introduction of a new school subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility" into the study programme of Industrial Management in the master degree at the Institute of Industrial Engineering, Management and Quality of STU MTF Trnava. To reach the goal, a KEGA project was submitted and approved.

The content of the project is to introduce the school subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility" into the study programme Industrial Management within the context of:

- *European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development,*
- *Strategy Europe 2020,*
- *Enterprise 2020,*
- *Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on education for sustainable development (2010/C 327/05),*
- *Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (2010),*
- *ISO 26000 – Guidance on Social Responsibility.*

The major goal of the project (3) is to introduce the school subject "**Sustainable corporate social responsibility**" to the study programme of **Industrial Management in the master degree at the SUT Faculty of Materials Science and Technology in Trnava.**

**The partial goals of the project are following (3):**

- *analyze available information about SD and CSR education,*
- *suggest curriculum of the school subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility",*
- *write educational text of the subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility",*
- *verify the quality of education of the subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility",*

- *optimize the curriculum of the subject “Sustainable corporate social responsibility” and educational text according to the results of the analysis.*

### ***Current State of the Subject***

*Baseline Study on CSR Practices in Slovakia* (2007) suggests the following proposals for the academic institutions (3):

- State universities should be the pioneers in CSR and raise consciousness about it.
- CSR courses should be provided at the faculties of economy and management. Academic institutions are responsible for educating the students who could perform prominent functions in the commercial sector.

Every European citizen should be equipped with the knowledge, practices and attitudes that help him understand and solve challenges and problems of everyday life, regarding environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts. The recession totally devalued the years of economic and social progress and revealed structural deficiencies in the European economy. Strategy that contributes to overcoming the crisis should be made to make the EU economy more intelligent and sustainable. The following documents could help to achieve the goal: European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development, Strategy Europe 2020, Enterprise 2020, Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on education for sustainable development (2010/C 327/05), Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (2010) and ISO 26000 – Guidance on Social Responsibility.

Our research is based on:

- *holistic (systematic) approach to our Planet Earth,*
- *knowledge that objective reality has its own evolutional development which is negatively hit by human long-time activity,*
- *confidence that the only alternative of humankind is the symbiosis of being conform with the nature and its development and SD regularities in all post-industrial expressions (sustainable production, sustainable consumption, sustainable manpower, sustainable marketing, sustainable profit, sustainable quality of life,...),*
- *work and opinions of A. Blažej, F. Capra, T. M. Cook, D. C. Corten, F. Gregor, H. Handerson, K. Hatiar, J. Hyršlová, L. A. Ismagilova, J. Keller, M. J. Kiernan, V. K. Lozenko, P. Staněk, W. E. Stead a J. G. Stead, D. Zdražilová, J. Zelený, etc.(3), [www.scss.sk](http://www.scss.sk).*

We want to connect the present practices and knowledge gained by solving the following research projects:

- *Grant scientific project No. 1/9099/02 VEGA “Environmentally oriented management, marketing and logistics in strategic business unites.*
- *Project APVV No. 019/2001: "Transforming Industry in Slovakia Through Participatory Ergonomic".*
- *KEGA ME SR No. 3-3111-05: "Creation of virtual robotized laboratory for supporting school subject “Robots and manipulators” in new accredited studying program.*
- *Project APVV under the contract No. LPP-0384-09: “Concept HCS model 3E vs. Concept Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) No. LPP-0384-09”.*

The last project is based on critical systematic analysis of the current state of creating and sharing wealth on this Planet. The aim is to disseminate results of the projects and to contribute to meeting the Agenda 21 vision and Lisbon strategy vision in individual pillars of SD strategy.

The textbook of the above-mentioned new school subject could contribute to the change of paradigm in generating and sharing the wealth on Planet of Earth. Since the current state in Slovakia, Europe and in the world, there's a threat of mankind expiration on this Planet.

### ***Characteristics and Project Description***

The project is focused on the content integration and diversification of the academic study. The approved project specializes in introduction of the school subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility" into the study programme of Industrial Management.

The presented project will prepare pedagogic and R&D employees of MTF STU Trnava in SD and CSR topics. The result will be an enhancement and extension of their theoretical knowledge and experience that could be applied and used in the educational and R&D processes.

### ***Anticipated Benefits of the Project***

**Anticipated benefits of the project are as follows (3):**

- ***Better graduates' performance in the labour market and improvement of their productivity and social cohesion.***
- ***Updating and enhancement of education process at MTF STU Trnava within the context of Strategy Europe 2020, Enterprise 2020, Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on education for sustainable development, Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (2010) and ISO 26000 – Guidance on Social Responsibility.***
- ***Increased students' motivation.***
- ***Increased quality of pedagogic and R&D work at MTF STU in Trnava.***
- ***Application of the Project output in the social and economy practice.***

Graduates of the newly designed school subject "Sustainable corporate social responsibility" will be the holders of SD and CSR ideas. They will be able to transform the knowledge to practice in Slovak industrial companies and they will affect the change of the paradigm step by step.

### **Conclusion**

Every citizen takes some responsibility for the future world order. The aim of the initiative Enterprise 2020 is to build sustainable business competitiveness, to transfer the idea of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility to every company and to support business cooperation in these fields. Enterprise 2020 represents a unique platform for schools and universities interested in cooperation with business entities. Together, they carry out research in the field of responsible management. In this paper, we emphasize our contribution to the initiative Enterprise 2020 by the KEGA project implementation with the goal to introduce the school subject "***Sustainable corporate social responsibility***".

***This paper was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. LPP-0384-09: "Concept of HCS model 3E vs. Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)." The paper is also a part of the approved KEGA project No. 037STU-4/2012 "Implementation of the subject "Corporate Social Responsibility Entrepreneurship" into the study programme Industrial Management in the Master degree at SUT FMST Trnava.***

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More about reforms in university education in Europe:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/slovensko/news/program\\_reformy\\_vysokoskolskeho\\_vzdelavania\\_sk.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/slovensko/news/program_reformy_vysokoskolskeho_vzdelavania_sk.htm)

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