Options for developing European strategies on citizenship education

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Abstract
This article explores the tools and strategic options for policymaking of two European intergovernmental organisations in the area of citizenship education. The first section analyses the policy tools used to date, whereas the second section presents current global, political and education-specific challenges in the field. The third section investigates options for how the two organisations might develop their policymaking in future years with a view to formulating recommendations to enable these organisations to make the best use of the policy tools and resources at their disposal. Overall, the article suggests that both the Council of Europe and the European Union are facing significant legal and resource restraints – to a greater extent where the Council of Europe is concerned and to a somewhat lesser extent for the European Union – that limit their capacity to shape and enforce citizenship education policymaking at national levels. Both institutions therefore rely heavily on informational and, to some extent, financial and organisational tools to influence policymaking. Finally, the paper presents a set of clear and actionable goals for improving the power and impact of the informational and organizational policy tools at the disposal of both institutions.

Keywords
Citizenship education, intergovernmental organisations, educational policy development, Europe, European Union, Council of Europe

Introduction
Political systems need the support of their citizens both for persistence and for reform (Easton, 1975). This holds also true for international political organisations (Wiesner, 2019). On the one hand, political support is grounded in the features of the organisations themselves, like good governance and positive outcomes; on the other hand, political support depends on the characteristics of the citizens. Norris (2011, 2017) elaborates that education and especially political understanding are essential for enabling the deliberate adoption of democratic values and a differentiated
assessment of political achievements. On this basis, the ‘critical citizen’ (Norris, 2011) can provide trust and mistrust, support for persistence, and support for change in response to what the political situation may require.

This article deals with the consequences of this general context for the policies on citizenship education by two European international organisations: the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU). In order to fulfil their constitutional goals (CoE, 1949; EU, 2007) and to survive as organisations, it would seem to be in these organisations’ interests to secure support for democratic governance and supranational policymaking. One way to do so might be via education. Yet education as an area of European policymaking has been developed only over the past 50 years (Grek and Lawn, 2009; Lawn and Grek, 2012). Furthermore, citizenship education was adopted as a target area even later but has been increasingly worked on over the last two decades (Grimonprez, 2020; Keating, 2014). Accordingly, both the CoE and the EU have been actively evolving their citizenship education policies.

The considerations presented in this article arose in the context of political agenda setting, both during the author’s participation in the European Education and Training Expert Panel (2019) and during the discussion of drafts for a position paper of Networking European Citizenship Education (NECE, 2020). In this sense, the article aims to provide an amplified discursive background for educational agenda setting for citizenship education at the European level.

The article begins by briefly outlining the different approaches and policy tools actually used by the CoE and the EU. Next, an analysis of the current challenges for civic and citizenship education highlights the importance and impact of global trends, systemic political changes, and education-specific issues. The final section explores some strategic options for the CoE and the EU to configure their policies on citizenship education for the next decade in light of the shared challenges they face.

Intergovernmental approaches to citizenship education in Europe

This section describes the CoE’s and the EU’s current approaches towards policymaking on citizenship education. Both organisations use a characteristic set of policy tools based on their organisational structures and the resources at their disposal. For the purpose of analysis, the distinction between informational, legal, financial and organisational policy tools is used (Abs and Werth, 2013; Hood, 1983; Howlett, 2005). Based on the principal resources available to governments, Hood (1983) assumes that there are four categories of tools at hand. The first tool is nodality, defined as an actor being embedded in the middle of a social network with access to a wide range of information and the ability to generate new information and to communicate purposefully. The second tool, authority, is based on established power and covers in particular the ability to organise legal norms and agreements. The third tool, finance, is grounded in monetary resources and the ability to allocate and manage a budget that might be used for the intended policy purposes. Finally, the fourth tool, organisation, consists of the administrative capacity that arises from the presence of a cadre of qualified people who collaborate under the premise of a political hierarchy.

The CoE: options and limitations for making policy on citizenship education

Although it would seem that the very origins and mission of the CoE imply some kind of mandate for the CoE to concern itself with citizenship education, the CoE’s legal, financial and organisational resources for influencing and determining citizenship education policy in its members states appear limited. The CoE has no legislative power in its own right but can broker agreements among its member states. It largely relies on informational tools – that is, various types of texts – to support national policymaking in this field.
The CoE’s leading concept for promoting citizenship education is titled Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC). The concept is defined as

(the) education, training, dissemination, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and moulding their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law. (CoE, 2010: 5–6)

By defining citizenship education in this way, the CoE focuses on the role that the individual plays in the persistence of human rights and democracy. This focus, in turn, can be traced back to the very origins of the CoE, which was founded to support the peaceful cooperation of European countries (CoE, 1949); for that purpose, its role and remit were expressly centred on promoting human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

The above definition of EDC was published in the CoE’s (2010) Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (hereafter the Charter). When used by the CoE, the term ‘charter’ usually signifies a treaty because CoE charters are documents of legally binding character, and the use of the term ‘charter’ would therefore seem to imply some kind of legal basis for action in the field of policymaking on citizenship education. However, the current Charter was adopted by the ministers of CoE member states only as an appendix to a recommendation, which means that the document itself does not involve or imply a legal obligation (Grimonprez, 2020). In fact, there is no legally binding regulation regarding EDC at the level of the CoE.

Further, not least due to its very low budget, the CoE has rarely provided countries with funding to support the implementation of specific policy strategies relating to citizenship education. Organisational tools also appear to have been used only very rarely; the CoE has initiated training sessions and workshops or provided training materials on a small scale mainly in some emerging or transformational countries. A small training centre supporting the implementation of CoE policies, the European Wergeland Centre, is financed predominantly by one of the member states (http://www.theewc.org). A teacher training programme open to participants from all over Europe, the Pestalozzi Programme (Gebauer, 2016), was discontinued for financial reasons in 2018.

Possibly in order to compensate for its lack of legal, financial and organisational power, the CoE has evolved a wide variety of informational tools to support policymaking. Notably, it has developed overview studies, exemplary schoolbooks, guidelines and recommendations. These materials have been compiled through a cooperative effort mainly by subject-matter experts from CoE member states or by further international organisations, such as the United Nations, selected by the CoE administration. Lastly, in addition to informational tools, networks involving national policymakers have been established, and thematic conferences have been organised in order to link the developments in the CoE’s EDC policy to the policies of its individual member states.

The existing informational texts produced by the CoE can be divided into four categories. First, there are stock-taking texts which were produced when the CoE first began to address the issue of citizenship education; for instance, in 2004, when an overview study on EDC practices in the CoE member states was published (Bîrzea, 2004). Second, small projects in member states have been used to develop materials for teachers. For instance, between 2007 and 2010, six volumes were published under the heading ‘Living Democracy’, which comprised mainly lesson plans and descriptions of educational models (Gollob et al., 2010; https://www.living-democracy.com/). Third, publications were compiled with the aim of informing and supporting the administrative bodies of the school system, such as national school inspectorates or national teacher training agencies. Examples of this type of text would be Introducing Quality Assurance in Education for Democratic
Citizenship: A Comparative Study on Ten Countries (Bîrzea et al., 2005; Abs, 2009), Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools or the Reference framework for democratic culture (CoE, 2018). Finally, the CoE has produced normative documents like the previously discussed Charter (CoE, 2010). Although not legally binding, from a political perspective, the Charter can be regarded as an authoritative policy tool because it has been officially adopted by the CoE’s member states and politicians may refer to this text when preparing decisions on citizenship education for their countries. However, the Charter is not sufficiently concrete to influence policies in a precise and predictable manner. For instance, the Charter asks member states to develop and conduct regular evaluations, but it does not provide operationalised criteria for the monitoring of citizenship education. The endeavour to contribute to national policymaking through the development of recommendations continues; the newest document in this sequence of recommendations deals with digital citizenship education (CoE, 2019). Finally, in order to align interpretations of its recommendations and to increase the use of the Reference framework of competences for democratic culture, the CoE in 2018 established the Education Policy Advisers Network comprised of representatives from all its member states. This network is meant to serve as a link between the CoE’s objectives regarding education for democratic citizenship and national developments (CoE, 2020). The creation and use of this type of network is another indication that the CoE predominantly relies on informational tools to support policymaking.

The EU: options and limitations for making policy on citizenship education

While the EU technically has a certain mandate to support policymaking on citizenship education that is rooted in the introduction of a European citizenship (EU, 1992), it has no official legislative power in this policy area. All activities of the EU have to follow the principle of subsidiarity, which means that activities must both respect the autonomy of its member states and support the member states’ agreement to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion within the EU (EU, 2007, art. 2). Because of the principle of subsidiarity, the EU does have sustainable and significant resources for providing informational tools, and it has implemented a formal, general strategy for education and training, although there is little content in the field of citizenship education (European Education and Training Expert Panel, 2019).

The EU’s leading concept for promoting citizenship education is entitled ‘Active Citizenship’. Active citizenship is defined as ‘Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy’ (Hoskins et al., 2006; Hoskins et al., 2012). By defining the objective of citizenship education in this way, the EU’s focus is arguably on integrating the individual into a given society and political system rather than on the role of the individual itself. This focus can be attributed to the origins of the EU, which evolved from the former European Economic Community (EEC) via the Treaty on European Union (TEU), signed in Maastricht in 1992. Significantly, the TEU grants a European citizenship to all citizens of EU member states. This new European citizenship can be said to have initiated a new governmental structure as well as an emerging public sphere which asks individuals to be much more involved with the EU than they were previously involved with any other international political organisation; for example, by voting in European elections or by being able to apply for individual funds. As a result, the EU is arguably a combination of an intergovernmental organisation and a governmental organisation itself (Rittberger and Zangl, 2006); as the latter, it promotes citizenship education to some extent to sustain its own organisational legitimacy (Jenson, 2007; Sack, 2013). Evidence to support this specific perspective on the EU is contained in the advanced constitutional TEU (EU, 2007). The EU and its member states agreed upon a common set of values for liberal democracy (art. 2) and they each declared their responsibility for contributing to the
promotion of these values (art. 3). Further, the treaty names ‘quality education’ (art. 165, para. 1) as a central objective for EU policy actions. However, given the introduction of a European citizenship (art. 8) and the decisive influence of the EU level of governance (art. 9) for its citizens, one might posit that ‘quality education’ within the EU cannot be achieved without also implementing a European dimension into citizenship education. EU citizens need to acquire the competences for defending democratic and individual rights and to contribute to the common values in Europe (Grimonprez, 2020: 691). In recent years, the European value-driven dimension in education has been increasingly highlighted (European Commission, 2020; European Council, 2018a, 2018b).

That notwithstanding, the EU has no official legislative power in the area of education and is largely restricted to supporting its member states. Limited to a ‘soft’ exertion of power, but with access to some significant resources, the EU has therefore developed its own set of policy tools, which includes a genuine combination of informational, financial and organisational tools. Through this framework, the EU sustains an ongoing and systematic effort in this area via its own official educational information network, Eurydice (2005, 2012, 2017). Additionally, in 2005, the European Commission founded its very own organisation for interpreting data on citizenship education (and other areas of education), the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) as part of the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC; https://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/). Since 2017, the tasks of this unit have been restructured and reallocated to another unit within JRC (Unit B4 Human Resources and Employment). Nonetheless, the JRC helps the European Commission to analyse and interpret results from a broad range of studies like the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which was carried out with EU support in 2009 and 2016 (Schulz et al., 2010, 2018). An example of how the JRC is supporting the European Commission with data and analysis is the chapter on citizenship education in the European Education and Training Monitor (European Commission, 2018: 9–23).

Lastly, the introduction of the EU’s new ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (OMC) has over time contributed to an EU-level strategy on education and training which has instituted some systematic indicators and benchmark regarding education in general, although not (yet) citizenship education in particular. Through the OMC, various EU policies have been integrated into a broader systematic approach (Odendahl, 2011) which tries to establish common objectives within all EU member states and enhances the dialogue about their implementation while at the same time financing policy measures that may be supportive of the objective in question. The OMC would appear to operate based on two key assumptions. First, member states are meant to acknowledge benchmarks and indicators over longer periods of time than one legislative period. Second, member states are meant to develop policies that are designed to achieve progress with respect to the specific, acknowledged indicators.

However, the impact of the OMC on citizenship education can be said to be somewhat limited by default because the European Commission is allowed only to monitor and support educational progress but cannot influence educational politics in a legally binding way. The final responsibility for progress in this field lies with the individual member states, which allows member states to choose their own preferred approach (if indeed any systematic approach at all). That said, in 2000, the European Council (comprised of the heads of national governments of EU member states) agreed on a series of benchmarks – set objectives with measurable indicators – regarding education which were supposed to have been accomplished by 2010 (Natali, 2009). However, it soon became evident that European countries would fail to reach four out of the five benchmarks by a significant margin by 2010. Therefore, the Education and Training Strategy 2020 formulated in 2009 partly amended the selection of indicators and benchmarks and set a new deadline of 2020 (European Council, 2009). Citizenship education as such, whether national or European, was not
represented by a benchmark in this strategy, but indicators were developed systematically (Hoskins et al., 2006; Hoskins and Mascherini, 2009). Now, a decade later, the EU is in the process of formulating its educational strategy up to 2030, and it should consider giving citizenship education a place in this strategy.

In sum, this paper posits that neither the CoE nor the EU has actual legislative power that would enable the organisations to enforce policymaking in the field of citizenship education. Both institutions seem to rely largely on informational tools to promote progress in this area. The EU, however, has larger financial and organisational resources, enabling it to provide more systematic informational and monitoring tools. While the CoE’s stock-taking reports are prepared on an ad hoc basis by volunteering scientists and subject-matter experts, the EU can rely on its own information network via Eurydice and on a professionalised agency, the IEA, which is prepared to direct one of its major projects at least partly towards the data needs of the EU. The policymaking constraints experienced by both institutions may be amplified by a set of challenges which are the focus of the next section.

Current challenges for citizenship education

This section outlines three possible sets of current challenges for citizenship education. The first set of challenges relates to global problems that affect societies as a whole and that are therefore relevant for politics in general and citizenship education in particular. The second set of challenges is inherent to political systems in that these challenges may affect the way in which general problems are perceived and addressed in political decision-making. The third set of challenges is specific to teaching and learning in the area of citizenship education. The three challenges may be regarded as interrelated layers surrounding teaching work.

Global challenges impacting citizenship education

At the global level, societies in general and policymakers in particular should recognise and address three major challenges that may affect and shape the content and future of citizenship education: protecting the natural environment, ever-increasing societal digitalisation, and growing levels of social divisions.

The first and possibly predominant challenge for the future of societies worldwide consists in protecting the natural environment to guarantee sustainable human life for future generations (Wals and Benavot, 2017). Currently, the lifestyles and organisation of western societies are not deemed sustainable. Climate change and the depletion of natural resources have in many ways led to a situation that may be endangering human life. Obviously, educational systems cannot manage to avert environmental disaster on their own. On the contrary, educational systems and their institutions are part of more comprehensive social and political structures that must be politically changed (Barth et al., 2016). However, citizenship education might contribute to environmental change by implementing common values that are not limited to a narrow focus on the wealth of the nation state throughout the next legislative period, but that instead make a valid contribution to a sustainable global future (O’Flaherty and Liddy, 2018). Hence, the challenge of securing the very foundation of life is not limited to a single nation state, and no nation state can find its way alone; education for sustainable development and global citizenship education are interlinked (UNESCO, 2015).

The second global challenge which this paper would like to consider is the digitalisation of society. Digitalisation does not only contribute tools that enhance our productivity and efficiency; it also changes how we produce information, what kind of information we produce and what information we access. Intermediate institutions such as newspapers seem to be increasingly losing
their importance for public debate and for shaping citizens’ opinions. Today, virtual spaces of
direct interchange with sometimes masked interests and which use tailored algorithms for pushing
news to target audiences are the main sources of information for citizens (Entman and Usher,
2018). Further, digitalisation is changing the reality of working life, and artificial intelligence is
predicted to replace human decision-making in many areas (Hawkins et al., 2015). At the same
time, a citizen’s very participation in society requires increasing levels of access to digital services
as well as the competences to master these digital services. Therefore, it can be argued that citizen-
ship education has to deal with the challenge of enabling students to participate in digital environ-
ments while shaping their own futures (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017) and while reflecting on the
manipulative potential of digital technologies that may be used to the detriment of equal opportuni-
ties and democracy (Hendricks and Vestergaard, 2019). Moreover, citizenship education should
address ethical and political questions regarding the space that remains for human responsibility
and decision-making in the face of artificial intelligence. This includes, for instance, the question
of how to avoid technological determinism and vanishing responsibility when robots are regulating
behaviour (Petit, 2018).

The third international challenge considered here concerns the growing level of social divisions
(Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019). On the one hand, social divisions are an inevitable consequence of
the mechanisms that guarantee our freedom and wealth, namely liberal democracy and the market
economy; on the other hand, social divisions have been analysed as representing a threat to social
cohesion (Green and Janmaat, 2011) and political participation (Deimel et al., 2020). It would
seem that existing disparities within countries are being exacerbated by environmental and techno-
logical changes, which can be turned more easily into profit by those who have more capacities
available to them. Finally, the flow of migration between countries may be intensifying the differ-
ences in environmental, technological and social developments within countries, thereby possibly
contributing further to social disparities both in the countries of emigration and in those of immi-
gregation. The countries of emigration may perceive the phenomenon of ‘brain drain’, while the
countries of immigration show a growing diversity of mindsets and identities. To make matters
worse, some politicians emphasise group identities in order to increase their own power platform;
but in so doing, they potentially support restricted group perspectives and neglect the potential to
develop cohesive perspectives for society as a whole. This might seem manifest because schools
traditionally have been developed for more homogeneous groups (like a religious community), and
education systems have been introduced to support the idea of homogenous nation states
(Osterhammel, 2009). But nowadays, it appears that schools have to serve ever more heterogeneous
societies, with teachers and students being characterised by multi-layered or hybrid identities
(Jasper and Abs, 2019).

Challenges within political systems

This section outlines three challenges that may affect the capacity of democratic political systems
to address the global challenges outlined in the previous section; these are political alienation,
populism, and diminishing acceptance of state authority. In this context, democracy is understood
as a core process of governance and society in general. As such, it involves the open deliberation
of multiple perspectives and causes regarding contemporary issues, and it leads to decisions on
alternative solutions while at the same time incorporating transparency and an equal chance for all
citizens to influence decisions (Abs et al., 2020: 70).

The first apparent challenge is citizens’ alienation from political institutions and the concomi-
tant decline of democratic participation (Schwartz, 2017; Stoker and Evens, 2014). Alienation has
been observed as a continuous process since the 1970s, manifest, for instance, in decreasing voter
turnouts (e.g. in national and European elections), decreasing memberships in political parties and a decreasing willingness to stand as a candidate in political elections.

On the one hand, alienation is possibly at least partly based on a lack of political competences on the part of citizens, which leads to low political self-efficacy (Reichert, 2016). On the other hand, alienation is partly caused by a decline of trust in the legitimacy and responsiveness of the political system (Foà and Mounk, 2016). Both causes are related to the question of how people can feel adequately represented by a political system, and under which circumstances the feeling of representation is blocked or fades away (Fraser, 2010: 19–20). Therefore, citizenship education should tackle the challenge of alienation and should explore new ways of securing political support among citizens (Norris, 2017). While the concept of political support was originally developed against the backdrop of the nation state, it is now also increasingly applied to international organisations (Hahn-Laudenberg and Abs, 2020).

The second challenge within the political system relates to populism, a political strategy, which builds its power on offering simple solutions in the face of complex challenges. To this end, populism negates multifaceted causalities, and its arguments are relatively monocausal and sometimes even monothematic. In so doing, populist politicians can be said to construct narratives for one group – the ‘own group’ – characterised by a narrowly defined national, religious or class identity which neglects the many hybrid identities that are a reality for a growing share of the population (Blühdorn and Butzlaff, 2019). Theoretically, one could also imagine a European populism which would claim Europeans as the ‘own group’ which must be given preference. However, as long as European identification is weak (Wiesner, 2019) and national identities are stronger than European identities (Ziemes et al., 2019), populist politicians cannot benefit from a European populism.

Dzur and Hendricks (2018) distinguish between ‘thin’ populism, which sees single politicians from a broad range of parties arguing in a populist way occasionally, and ‘thick’ populism, which is characterised by the setting up of organisational structures – movements or parties – which solely promote the interests of one (national, ethnic or religious) group. In order to bond the ‘own group’ together, populist movements and parties often work with the emotions of pride, anger and fear. ‘Pride’ here describes the group’s attitude to its history, while anger and fear matter because of the inherent assumption that other groups want to deprive the ‘own group’ of its possessions. According to the analysis by Rico et al. (2017), anger is more important in this process than fear. In populist views, the cause of any given problem lies outside the ‘own group’, and members of the ‘own group’ assume no moral responsibility for any problems to which they themselves may have contributed: problems are always the other groups’ fault. Identity groups following the populist worldview hold a clear, distinct set of interests, which neglects the plurality of interests that has traditionally defined democracies. As only positions based on the ‘own group’s’ supposed interest can be accepted, protracted debate and a desire to compromise are not on the agenda of populist movements.

Populist discourses conceivably exploit growing alienation by filling the gap of understanding with simplistic answers to questions that are actually complex, and by raising suspicion against democratic institutions (Finchelstein and Urbinati, 2018). In order to be able to respond to this challenge, citizenship education requires the creation and teaching of a renewed and updated core of conceptual knowledge on politics, as well as analytical competences and the fostering of skills to counter disinformation, conspiracy narratives, and the distortion of reality via oversimplification (Lührmann et al., 2020).

The third challenge within the political system relates to an apparent trend towards citizens’ diminishing acceptance of the legal democratic authorities’ monopoly on the use of physical power to enforce law and order. There is plentiful evidence of this monopoly being publicly called into question (Haak, 2019; Pearce, 2020). This can take the form of a lack of support and even obstruction of police officers and other state representatives while they carry out their duties. Questioning
the state’s authority can quickly evolve into acts of self-administered law; for example, in cases when ideas on justice or punishment as held by the ‘own group’ differ from those embedded in the state’s legal system (Gerber and Jackson, 2017). Finally, disregard of the state’s monopoly on the use of force may lead to acts of terrorism aimed at influencing political decisions (Rosenfeld, 2011). It is the task of the political and education systems to support deradicalisation among those who are involved (Goerzinger, 2019).

A weaker manifestation of the diminishing acceptance of democratic authority may consist in acts of civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is a form of non-violent resistance to state power or authority. Civil disobedience movements generally receive more support from the population than violent protesters. The lack of violence apparently enhances the legitimacy of the cause of the civil disobedience movement and encourages more people to join (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). A current example of civil disobedience is the ‘Fridays for Future’ movement, an international movement that encourages students not to attend school on Fridays and instead attend demonstrations on climate change policies (Mattheis, 2020). While the students participating in these so-called school strikes do not harm any authorities directly, they might conceivably inflict harm on themselves and their own futures by putting their school results at risk through non-attendance. As long as increasing numbers of students will join in the ‘Fridays for Future’ strikes, there will be sufficient momentum to keep the movement in the headlines. Notwithstanding, in order to increase impact, other movements, such as Extinction Rebellion, have begun to initiate activities that (slightly) harm others; for example, by blockading major traffic junctions (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020). While undeniably impactful, any escalation of measures also risks costing sympathies. Therefore, a challenge for political systems is to recognise the signs of diminishing acceptance and to decide where to fight for existing institutions and where to adapt in order to achieve sustained support (Norris, 2017).

All in all, the challenges described in the political system create three clear imperatives for citizenship education which policymakers should address. First, citizenship education must recognise and address the challenges of alienation from political institutions. Second, citizenship education must create the knowledge base and the tools required to enable citizens to recognise the limitations of, and respond adequately to, simplistic populist discourse. And third, citizenship education must include strategies for redressing the diminished acceptance of the democratic and political authority of the state and its institutions.

**Inherent challenges of citizenship education**

As the previous two sections have shown, the catalogue of global and systemic political challenges that citizenship education must potentially address is both long and complex. To further compound the level of intricacy for policymakers in this field, citizenship education faces inherent challenges of its own. The three potentially most important of these challenges may be identified as follows: first, the weak institutionalisation of citizenship education in science and educational support systems; second, the relatively small number of qualified teachers and the marginal representation of citizenship education in school curricula; and third, the unclear code of conduct and the lack of an evidence base for citizenship teachers when it comes to working on the challenges mentioned in the two previous sections. These challenges occur necessarily at the level of the national education systems. Hence, the CoE and the EU are not able to provide regular direct instruction; instead, their challenge is how to connect their policy guidelines with the practices in member states.

Citizenship education for democracy has traditionally been a field with few resources. Most EU member states do not provide the infrastructure for an academic discipline relating to citizenship education, and provide only a weak infrastructure for implementing citizenship education at school
Internationally, a few individual scientists in the fields of education, political sciences, sociology, and psychology and its neighbouring disciplines are addressing the issue, but nonetheless there is little academic cumulative effect (Hoskins et al., 2016). Only very few countries provide special, state-financed support organisations for professional citizenship education within democracies; for example, Germany has the Federal Agency for Civic Education (www.bpb.de/en), the Netherlands has ProDemos (https://prodemos.nl/english) and Belgium has Belvue (www.belvue.be/en). In most European countries, non-governmental organisations compensate for the lack of state involvement, but their resources are limited and not as continuous as institutional funding by the state would be. The major pertinent public and non-governmental organisations in Europe collaborate in the framework of NECE (www.nece.org).

The weak infrastructure for citizenship education in Europe correlates with a relatively small share of the overall learning time that is invested in citizenship education. The Eurydice (2017) report provides a first insight into how much diversity can be observed in the organisation and structure of citizenship education across Europe. In a significant number of countries, the national curriculum does not dedicate explicit subject or learning time to citizenship education for a majority of year groups. The situation may be even more diverse within countries than the Eurydice report shows at national level because, unlike traditional disciplines – for instance, mathematics, language and sciences – the curriculum for citizenship education (if it exists) is less based in a scientific tradition and less standardised so that identical terms may cover different content and vice versa. Therefore, it cannot be taken for granted that a majority of students in Europe learn about and debate the global and political challenges mentioned in the previous sections.

This assumption is substantiated when reviewing some statistics for Germany, where citizenship education is part of the formal curriculum within the federal states. A recent curriculum analysis calculated how many minutes of civic education per week individual students receive in Germany’s largest federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia. Depending on the school type, the results show that students may receive between 17 and 20 minutes of civic education per week (Gökbudak and Hedtke, 2017, 2020). But time on task is not the only predictor for learning; the qualification of the teacher and the resulting competences for instruction are also important. In this regard, the results for the same federal state are just as disconcerting. Depending on the type of school, between 27% and 86% of instruction on civic education is provided by teachers without an appropriate formal qualification (Manzel et al., 2017). In addition, there is no specific recruitment initiative for student teachers in the discipline of citizenship education by universities, nor for teachers by schools. The picture becomes even bleaker when considering that these are the results of a country in which a teacher education programme for citizenship education does actually exist.

Given this low level of institutionalisation and the fragile (at best) implementation, the teaching and learning of citizenship education needs standards that can inform curriculum and professional development. With regard to teaching content, the Reference framework of competencies for democratic culture (CoE, 2018) can be considered as a fresh landmark providing a point of orientation for the development of national curricula and teaching materials. But with regard to teaching practices, such a landmark document is still missing. This poses problems because in a more polarised society the expectations placed on teachers are being debated. Open questions include, among others: whether teachers are allowed – or even obliged – to stay neutral in a debate (i.e. on human rights); whether teachers are allowed to take a stand; whether they are expected to make their own opinion transparent; how they can increase the quality of debate when dealing with controversial issues; how they make use of digital tools for participation; and how they reflect and/or cultivate emotions among students. In part, these are normative questions, but to some extent the answers would also profit from an evidence base regarding how various teaching strategies influence learning.
Citizenship education, then, is an under-resourced academic discipline frequently under-represented in national teacher education curricula and which lacks clear standards and differentiated research profiles. Given the global and political challenges citizenship education must address, policymakers have a critical and problematic task on their hands. The next section explores some options for the CoE and the EU to shape policymaking on citizenship education at national and international levels.

**Strategic options for European policymaking on citizenship education**

This section reviews some possible strategic options for policymaking in the area of citizenship education available to the CoE and the EU. The challenges outlined in the previous sections would seem to demand new formats of learning and new ways of inducting students into an active and reflective role as citizens. The overall goal remains the same as it has been historically, namely to strengthen citizens’ ability and preparedness to participate in governance and to engage for the common good; but how to achieve this goal is a question that requires careful calibration to align the policy tools at hand with current challenges. Any proposals must take into account the legal, financial and organisational constraints on the CoE and the EU. This section is partly based on the work of the European Education and Training Expert Panel (2019), which aimed to devise strategic future goals for education within the EU. The author was a member of that panel.

**Strategic options for the CoE to develop citizenship education policy**

As previously discussed, the CoE’s capacity for policymaking in the field of citizenship education is arguably limited by its lack of financial and organisational resources. That notwithstanding, its wide geographic reach and the credible international collaboration that it can oversee provide the CoE with the frameworks and tools required to help develop citizenship education strategy at national levels in three meaningful ways, namely through a dialogue on standards, a dialogue on common practices, and through the involvement of non-EU countries.

In exploring the potential strategic options for the CoE going forward, it has to be considered that the reduction of its resources may accelerate as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the next decade or so, there seems to be no prospect of resources that would enable substantial financial support for citizenship education initiatives in CoE member states; moreover, the organisational capacity of the CoE in the educational field may be further declining. Yet this does not mean that the CoE has no strategic options for supporting citizenship education programmes.

Indeed, the CoE is still the oldest international organisation working for democracy in Europe, and it possesses a higher nodality for a greater number of countries than any other organisation. Its very nodality allows the CoE to use information tools and to generate outputs, which represent credible joint efforts by a broad range of countries. The new *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture* (CoE, 2018), for example, is the result of a five-year process involving practitioners, scientists and policymakers across Europe. Implementing this framework establishes educational goals that may contribute to an increased efficacy of young people as democratic citizens. For the CoE, it would now be imperative to use this framework as a starting point to continue to develop the content and structures of citizenship education, giving particular consideration to the challenges discussed in the second section above. Specifically, collaborating with practitioners, the workability of the competence descriptions included in the framework should be further explored and concrete approaches for formal instruction and non-formal learning need to be
developed or adapted for the various competences. Working with policymakers, strategies for the alignment of the reference framework with national curricula may be exchanged. Working with experts, model curricula may be developed and further communicated to teacher education.

The CoE, then, has at its disposal three specific strategic avenues for action in order to embed the framework and its contents in national policies: initiating a dialogue on curriculum standards with CoE member states; similarly initiating a dialogue on common practices; and engaging non-EU states in the process.

First, the CoE might seek to initiate dialogue processes with member states to establish minimal curricular standards to integrate the framework, or aspects of it, into national curricula. The result of this dialogue could be jointly drafted in terms of a minimum curriculum for democratic citizenship education in Europe; for instance, as part of a CoE recommendation by the committee of education ministers.

Second, the CoE could provide a platform for grassroots initiatives working in the field and enhancing a European-wide dialogue on common practices for citizenship education. The CoE would be the appropriate organisation to establish such a dialogue because it is the only intergovernmental organisation in Europe providing non-governmental organisations with participatory status (CoE, 2016). Given this tradition, the CoE would also be the right organisation to develop professional standards for non-governmental organisations working in the field. Cooperating with the NECE could be a further strategy to increase the potential of the CoE-driven dialogue on common practice.

Third, the CoE could extend the dialogue process to non-EU countries. The CoE is already an important partner in communicating the goals and methodology of citizenship education to countries that are members of the CoE itself, but not part of the EU, like Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and the Ukraine. In actively engaging with these countries, the CoE might be able to prove that human rights values and democracy are not possessions or exclusive privileges of EU citizens. In fact, it is part of the CoE’s institutional mission that human rights and democracy should be a commitment that goes beyond the nation state.

**Strategic options for the EU to develop citizenship education policy**

A combination of a strategic mandate to promote citizenship education, access to some significant financial resources, and a set of robust monitoring and information resources enables the EU to formulate policy goals for citizenship education. Yet there is scope for improvement in these resources, which would be particularly important given that informational and organisational policy tools may be the EU’s most significant source of political influence since its actual legislative competence in this area is limited.

The EU benefits from a clear strategic mandate to work on the area of citizenship education that should enable it to influence policymaking in this field. As previously discussed, the introduction of a European citizenship in the TEU has provided a mandate, if limited, for EU action in this field. On the one hand, the TEU guarantees the right of the member states to take independent decisions on their curricula and education systems (TEU, art. 165, para. 1); on the other hand, however, their independence is limited because they have to respect the common objectives of the treaty. The treaty defines a subsidiary role for the EU, which is of specific importance when it comes to the definition and implementation of coherent objectives, particularly for preparing young people to participate in democratic life in Europe (TEU, art. 165, para. 2). Further, the member states and the EU commit themselves to international cooperation in the field of education and accentuate the cooperation with the CoE in this respect (TEU, art. 165, para. 3; Grimonprez, 2020: 66). Consequently, the European
Council has also provided a strategic basis that legitimises the use of further policy tools in this area through the European Commission by defining citizenship competence as one of the eight key competences for the future development of European education systems (European Council, 2018a). Moreover, the recently initiated development of a European education area (European Commission, 2020: 3–6) may pave the way for a stronger focus on citizenship education and the European dimension in this area.

Due to the restricted legal competence of the EU in the field of education policy, however, the tools in question will have to be essentially of an informational and organisational nature. This is why the monitoring and information instruments and their areas for improvement as discussed below are so important to the EU’s portfolio of options for policymaking in this field.

Through the Eurydice reports and the IEA study on civic and citizenship education, the EU has at its disposal a set of monitoring instruments which, while already fairly robust and systematic, could both be enhanced and developed to further support the EU’s capacity for modelling national policymaking on citizenship education. The Eurydice reports contain information and analysis on the ways in which European national education systems are structured and organised, but they could potentially be improved in four ways. First, they could include more evidence from non-governmental stakeholders. At the moment, the information presented in the Eurydice reports is based on one ministerial informant per country. Second, some means of validating the information provided by these sources would seem to be necessary in order to preclude misunderstandings. For instance, Eurydice outputs could be combined with research studies clarifying whether concepts are used in a comparable manner and how certain approaches are being implemented on a wider scale. Third, multi-perspectivity would enhance the value of the Eurydice reports. For instance, where they exist, national student councils or student unions could comment on the draft reports. Fourth, the reports could be used to initiate a dialogue between countries on how they are going to develop the area of citizenship education in view of current challenges as outlined in the second section above. Should this broadened scope of future Eurydice reports not work well in all countries, the obligatory part, which all members must complete, could be reduced to a minimum, and the enhanced comparison could be conducted with those countries which are prepared to take part. These are four actionable goals for the EU to enhance the value of the Eurydice reports in its policymaking on citizenship education.

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) could be improved or extended in two ways. ICCS is a tool for measuring the extent to which 14-year-olds are initially prepared to carry out their role as citizens. Overall, young people in most EU member states tend to score on average at least moderately well on the knowledge scale (achievement level B; European Commission, 2018). However, this level of achievement might be insufficient to address the challenges discussed in the previous sections because only students reaching achievement level A are deemed to be able to imagine more than one cause of a problem and to deal with two arguments simultaneously. This calls for two areas of improvement to the ICCS. First, it would seem important to initiate further research exploring how efficient students with a certain achievement level are in engaging politically; and second, it would seem indicated to develop adequate instruments for adolescents who are approaching voting age.

But the scope for strategic action by the EU conceivably goes beyond the Eurydice and ICCS reports themselves. While both the relevant ICCS and the Eurydice studies on citizenship education provide overviews of structures and achievement levels, due to their limited scope they can neither develop new approaches to current challenges nor provide insight into the effectiveness of specific educational methods. Therefore, additional work is needed in order to develop and test new approaches which deal more directly with the global and political challenges discussed previously, and which also include the concepts of complexity, hybridity, plurality and sustainability.
Already existing policy tools of the European Commission could be leveraged for the development of these new approaches in several ways.

First, research framework programmes (in this case, Horizon Europe, the programme following Horizon 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/horizon2020) could include calls that are more analytic in nature as well as calls asking for new developments. For instance, an empirical project on implicit and explicit codes of conduct for citizenship education in Europe could provide an important basis for a European debate on the scope of citizenship education.

Second, while key actions one and two of the Erasmus+ programme (https://ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus) have offered a range of low-threshold cooperation formats, their enduring effect on educational practices (e.g. in the area of citizenship education) is not being evaluated sufficiently at this time. Unfortunately, these actions also do not include a mechanism for identifying evidence-based best practices and for bringing these best practices to scale. Evaluations and additional effort for the up-scaling of those projects that are deemed to be best practice offer two options for improvement in this area.

Third, key action 3 of the Erasmus+ has delivered a new type of project called ‘policy experiment’, which already tries to remedy some of the deficits of key actions 1 and 2. Policy experiments implement a standardised approach in more than one member state and combine this approach with a rigorous evaluation (Morgenroth et al., 2017). The participating member states agree to react to the evidence base provided during the course of the project and to consider up-scaling implementation in practice. Until now, there has been no call for policy experiments in the area of citizenship education. But the follow-up programme to the current Erasmus+ after 2020 could tender, for instance, a policy experiment on the implementation of a curriculum for teacher education to prepare the next generation of teachers for the new challenges of citizenship education. In addition, policy experiments on certain teaching approaches – for example, training on arguing and debating political issues – would be a valuable option.

Finally, if the EU wanted to go beyond the refinement of its existing policy tools, it could set up a new European support organisation for citizenship education. However, in order to do so, more systematic research on the scope and properties of such organisations would need to be conducted at the national and European levels first.

Improving the informational and monitoring tools through the actions described above might better position the EU to shape policy discourse on European and national citizenship education, thereby enacting its mandate to work in this area.

Conclusions
This article has explored the tools and strategic options for policymaking of two European intergovernmental organisations in the area of citizenship education. While the first section has analysed the policy tools used to date, the second section has presented a selection of current global, political and education-specific challenges in the field. The third section has investigated potential options for the two organisations for developing their policymaking in future years. This has been done in order to make the best use of the policy tools and resources available for each of the organisations. Overall, it was found that both the CoE and the EU are facing significant legal and resource restraints – to a greater extent where the CoE is concerned and a somewhat lesser extent for the EU – that may limit their capacity to shape and enforce citizenship education policymaking at national levels. It was argued that both institutions therefore rely heavily on informational and, to some extent, organisational and financial tools to influence policymaking. For both institutions, a set of clear and actionable goals was described to improve the power and impact of the informational and organisational policy tools at their disposal.
The analysis has focused on Europe because the two organisations under investigation are themselves focused on European countries. This does not mean that the global, political and education-specific challenges identified are exclusively European. The challenges may also apply to other regions; however, there is no intention to colonise other regions by imposing European-focused research as a blueprint on them. If a similar analysis were to be applied to other regions, a careful assessment of the context in those regions and the challenges they may face would be required. In turn, any such assessment of, for instance, the policy tools used in other regions could also inform future policymaking in Europe.

The article has highlighted the potential for the improvement of existing practices and the development of new practices that arises from international cooperation. It is clear that international cooperation in the development of citizenship education can embrace a broad range of approaches. Moreover, it is vitally important to recognise that the results of international cooperation in this field provide evidence of the persistence of a pluralistic and rights-based perspective on democracy that stands contrary to authoritarian models of citizenship education. This finding alone may be reason enough to instigate further searches for new policy tools in the field of citizenship education that increase and enhance the collaboration between European countries and furthermore between countries and regions in a global perspective.

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