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European Education, Training and Youth Forum 2013 ‘Working together for reforms’

Brussels, 17-18 October 2013

The welcome session is chaired by **Xavier Prats-Monné**, Deputy Director General DG Education and Culture.

**Androulla Vassiliou**, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, refers to important new documents/developments:

* The ‘Rethinking education’ strategy that puts skills in the spotlights (basic and transversal skills).
* The new ‘Education and Training Monitor 2013’, a good tool for evidence based policy making.
* PIAAC results, which show that there is an important group of low skilled adults; this undermines social cohesion and competetiveness.

Upgrading skills will require a broad effort, reflected in the title of today’s forum ‘Working together for reforms’. There are already examples of cross boarder and cross sectoral cooperative approach (the ‘Youth guarantee’ and the ‘Alliance for Apprenticeships’).

The Commission will continue to work together with a broad range of stakeholders in the new programme Erasmus + (is about mobility, but also about cooperation and exchange). Erasmus + will support the EU 2020 strategy, the ET2020 framework and the youth strategy. Cooperation is not an end in itself, it is a means to achieve better education and training systems. Dialogue with social partners is crucial to face the challenges, cooperation needs to become deeper and more focused. On 16 October, a high-level meeting on education and training took place beteen European Commissioner Vassiliou and the leaders of the European social partners. Common priority areas have been endorsed; proposals have been formulated to guide the way forward for a strengthened coopetarion between the Commission’s education and training services and the European social partners in the field (ETUC- BUSINESSEUROPE –CEEP - UEAPME – ETUCE – EFFE) (see attached report DOC 042).

The country specific recommendations are to be seen as sound advice, not as criticism or reproaches. The Commissioner stresses that progress has been made towards the benchmarks related to early school leaving and higher education attainment.

**Doris Pack**, Chair of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament insists on the good cooperation (‘Freundshaft’) between Commission, Council and Parliament in the preparations of Erasmus+. She is happy that the brand names have been maintained, and that there is a separate youth chapter. She stresses that the strong elements from the lifelong learning programme have to remain strong (exchanges for school pupils under Comenius, e-Twinning, Grundtvig exchanges).

**Dainius Pavalkis**, Minister of Education and Science, Lithuania, says that education is so much more than acquiring skills and knowledge. It is critical to foster democratic values and to strive to social equity. Education is a unique source of strength. Investing in edcuation leads to more self confidence, creativity, innovation. He suggests to concentrate not so much on education outcomes, but on impact of these results on society.

**Pierre Mairesse** (Director Europe 2020 policy development and country analysis) presents the results of the ‘Education and Training Monitor 2013’.

To be able to produce country specific recommendations, a good evidence base is needed. We cannot make policy based on intuition and emotion.

* The results

The rate of ESL is down to 12,7%: a limited progress for the last 8 years. But: some Member States show recent increase, and the unemployment rate of ESL is very high (40%) and participation rate in non-formal education is very low (1%).

For tertiary education attainment, progress is bigger: over 8% in the last 8 years, to 35,7%.

Pierre Mairesse refers to the PIAAC results: 20% of the adults fail in basic literacy and numeracy skills; transversal skills are lagging behind.

* The impact

Education and training contribute to growth and competetiveness, but there is a mismatch between the worlds of education and the world of work.

* Investment

There is a tension: more than 5% of the GDP is spent on education, but public debt is higher than 90% in 2014 and economic growth is expected to remain modest. Conditions for investment in Europe are thus difficult. In 16 Member States educational investments decreased from 2008 until 2011.

* Reforms

Three areas are identified in which reforms are crucial: work-based learning, the teaching profession, and opening up education (Only 20% of the students are taught by digitally confident and supportive teachers).

**Xavier Prats-Monné** presents Erasmus +: new funding opportunities for 2014-2020. He states that there should be no more discussion on the priorities: priorities are clear and set in the Europe 2020 Strategy and Education and Training 2020 framework. The new programme is one single programme, which allows simplicity and efficiency. It is crucial that the beneficiaries of the programme will work towards EU added value.

The three key actions are equally important, although this is not reflected in the budget (mobility is by far the most expensive action).

To conclude the morning, a panel of experts debates on how cooperation between stakeholders can contribute to modernising educaiton and training systems and youth policies.

The president of EUCIS-LLL presents the outcomes of the online consultation that ran from July until October 2013.

EUNEC participated at the workshop on cooperation and synergies between formal and non-formal education to reduce ESL. Introduction by **Maria Bognar** (Hungary), presenting the programme Dobbanto and by Professor **Howard Williamson** , Professor of European Youth Policy from Wales, presenting the case study Pen-y-dre High School.

Main conclusion of the workshop: Cooperation between non-formal and informal learning is needed, bridges have to be built, but not only in the field of tackling early school leaving. The issue of recognition is crucial: do outcomes of non-formal and informal learning activities have to be recognized? Is recognition in formal education a guarantee for quality?

On the second day of the conference, the European Commission presents two recent EU policy documents:

* Opening up education
* European Higher Education in the world

The closing roundtable discusses how programmes (Erasmus +, European Structural and Investment Fund) can contribute to the objectives of Europe 2020 regarding education, employment and social inclusion through partnerships at European, national and regional level: a stronger link between policy and programme. All participants stress the importance of learner-centered approach.

The representative of the European Commission recommends that participants should not wait for the legal adoption of Erasmus + before starting to prepare the applications. The Commission is, from her side, preparing the calls for proposals; it is possible that they will be published before legal adoption.

Conclusions of the conference by **Xavier Prats-Monné**. Bringing different perspectives to the same challenges, to come to better understandings of each others’ needs is the key message of this conference. Don’t only prepare people for the labour markt, but also concentrate on inclusion for disadvantaged groups. The lesson for all is to get to know and to take into account each others’ needs.

Where are we going to be in seven years? It is very likely that the world will be very different by then. There are important disruptive changes. We have to work towards a massive upgrade of quantity and quality of skills, in partnership and with collaborative effort. Our future will be good or bad depending on how much we base our future on education. We have the certainty of a seven year budget, and we will have a new Parliament and a new Commission in one year. This is an opportunity to do much more for education.