



6282/17

(OR. en)

PRESSE 6
PR CO 6

OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3518th Council meeting

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

Education issues

Brussels, 17 February 2017

President

Evarist Bartolo

Minister for Education and Employment of Malta

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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ITEMS DEBATED

Investing in Europe's youth

The Council adopted conclusions on investing in Europe's youth, focusing on the European Solidarity Corps ([5860/17](#)). The conclusions provide a political response to the Commission's Youth Initiative presented in December 2016 ([15420/16](#)).

The conclusions underline that greater opportunities to take an active role at community level will significantly contribute to the development of the social and civic skills and competences required for young people's active participation in building more inclusive and democratic societies.

They also recall the need to renew efforts to promote and safeguard the values of the EU, in particular its values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, so as to continue strengthening young people's sense of European identity and enhance their trust in and positive view of the EU project.

The proposal for establishing a **European Solidarity Corps** (ESC) ([15421/16](#)) is part of a package of measures proposed by the Commission aimed at improving young people's skills and opportunities in order to tackle youth unemployment and increase youth participation and learning mobility.

The European Solidarity Corps will allow more young people to participate in a wide range of solidarity activities, either by volunteering or through a job, traineeship or apprenticeship supporting a non-governmental organisation (NGO), local authority or private company active in addressing difficult situations across the European Union ([European Solidarity Corps](#)).

All young people should be able to participate irrespective of their background, education, level of skills or any disability. Since the launch of the ESC, 22 000 young people have already expressed their interest in the scheme.

The Commission explained that the ESC will be set up gradually. In the first phase, funding will come from existing programmes and budget lines, in particular the Erasmus+, to support placements of participants in the ESC.

In the second phase, scheduled for late May 2017, the Commission will propose a legal framework that will be financed through its own budget line and have a separate legal basis.

The ESC will also make use of existing structures, mainly the [European Voluntary Service](#), with the objective of seeing the first 100 000 young Europeans taking part in its activities by 2020.

Inclusion in diversity

The Council adopted conclusions on **inclusion in diversity** to achieve **high-quality education for all** ([5741/17](#)), also in response to the Commission communication 'Improving and modernising education'([15418/16](#)).

The conclusions recall that education policy plays a key role in increasing inclusion and respect for diversity in the European Union and that ensuring inclusive high-quality education should be seen from a lifelong perspective covering all aspects of education, and encompassing the whole school community and the community at large.

They stress that high-quality education and training for all based on inclusivity, equality, appropriate competences and values also encourages employability, innovative thinking, digital skills and competences, and contributes to the development of active citizenship.

The conclusions also argue that equal opportunities for all are crucial, but not sufficient: 'equity' in terms of the aims, content, teaching methods and forms of learning being provided for by education and training systems must be developed. It is also important to come up with concrete actions that address the needs of teachers and educators facing the increasing diversity in schools.

They invite member states to promote closer cooperation and innovative approaches between education and other relevant areas, such as culture, youth, sports, employment, welfare, security and other sectors working to promote social inclusion.

While education and training remain a national competence, EU-level policies, such as Europe 2020 and the European Semester, can be used to complement and support member states' actions in this area.

Education and training contribution to the European Semester

Ministers discussed the contribution of education and training to social cohesion and the fostering of common European values in the framework of the European Semester 2017.

The Commission stressed that investments in education always pay dividends but they should be smart and effective. Economic growth and social cohesion go hand in hand and must be at the heart of the European Semester.

The Commission intends to present a proposal for a recommendation on inclusive education and fundamental values through education and non-formal learning, following a wide public consultation.

Ministers agreed on the need to preserve the fundamental values of our European education model, while acknowledging that European education and training systems are facing many challenges in a rapidly changing world.

Ministers stressed that education must also promote personal development, social inclusion and civic participation.

The main results of the debate were as follows:

- School is the place to build equality, inclusion and citizenship
- Teachers and school staff have a crucial role to play and need to be supported through specific training that prepares them to deal with new realities
- No children should be left behind
- Tailor-made responses must be implemented, in particular for pupils with disadvantaged and/or migrant backgrounds
- There is an urgent need to develop media literacy so that young people can learn to distinguish between facts, opinions and lies and avoid manipulation
- Cross-sectoral policies are crucial to ensure effective results

- Exchange of best practices between member states can be extremely useful
- Adequate financing is essential and best use should be made of European programmes in this area.

Most member states have already put in place or are planning further measures to address these issues.

The Commission also drew attention to the need to improve early childhood care and reduce early school leaving.

It recalled the importance of cooperation in peer-learning activities, for instance through platforms such as e-twinning and also the various actions in Erasmus +.

To conclude, the Maltese minister recalled that inclusion in diversity is not a charity project but a human rights project; we also learn from those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

The outcome of the debate will be summarised by the Presidency and included in the summary report to be forwarded to the General Affairs Council and subsequently presented to the March European Council.

Lunch debate

During a working lunch, ministers focused their exchange of views on the Commission's communication 'Improving and modernising education' ([15418/16](#)), which constitutes the education strand of the package 'Investing in Europe's Youth'.

The Commission confirmed that in the course of 2017 it will present specific actions to increase its support for member states in their efforts to reform education and training systems, in particular

- an updated agenda for the **modernisation of higher education**,
- an initiative on **graduate tracking**,
- an agenda for supporting the **development of schools and teachers**,

- a review of the Recommendation on **Key Competences for Lifelong learning**,
- further measures to support the **digital transformation in education**.

The Commission has also announced that it will propose a **Quality Framework for Apprenticeships** in the field of vocational education and training.

Other business

- Securing democracy through education

The Council took note of information from the Cyprus delegation concerning the ministerial conference on 'Securing democracy through education' that will take place in Nicosia on 22–23 March 2017 ([5861/17](#)). Cyprus is chairing the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Conference will address the following subjects in particular:

- Fighting violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism;
- Education provision for refugees – from short-term solutions to long-term integration.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FOOD LAW****Food contact materials**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation authorising a further substance that may be used in food contact materials ([5397/17](#)).

The Commission regulation is subject to the 'regulatory procedure with scrutiny'. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS**EU Special Representative in Afghanistan**

The Council extended the mandate of Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin as the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) in Afghanistan until 31 August 2017. The Council also allocated a budget of EUR 5.7 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 31 August 2017 to cover the expenditure relating to the mandate of the EUSR.

The mandate of the EUSR in Afghanistan is to promote EU policy objectives in that country. These include contributing to the implementation of the EU-Afghanistan joint declaration, and leading the implementation of the EU action plan on Afghanistan and Pakistan (in so far as it concerns Afghanistan), thereby working with EU Member States' representatives and supporting the United Nations (UN) in Afghanistan with particular emphasis on contributing to better coordinated international assistance. Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin was appointed EUSR in Afghanistan as of 1 September 2013.

Relations with Zimbabwe

The Council decided to maintain the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Zimbabwe. The measures are extended until 20 February 2018. They include a ban on arms exports and exports of goods that might be used for internal repression, an asset freeze and a travel ban on the presidential couple Robert and Grace Mugabe and an asset freeze on one entity, the 'Zimbabwe Defence Industry'. The suspension of the application of restrictive measures for five individuals agreed last year is maintained.

EU Special Representative for the Sahel

The Council extended the mandate of Ángel Losada Fernández as the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel until 30 June 2018. The EUSR contributes actively to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the region. The EUSR also contributes to the implementation of the EU's human rights policy in the region in cooperation with the EUSR for Human Rights. The Council allocated a budget of EUR 1.84 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure relating to the EUSR's mandate.

EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia

The Council extended the mandate of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia Herbert Salber until 30 June 2018. The objective of the mandate is to develop the EU's dialogue with governments, parliaments, the judiciary, civil society and other key political stakeholders in the region. The Council allocated a budget of EUR 2.99 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure relating to the EUSR's mandate.

EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa

The Council extended the mandate of Alexander Rondos as the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Horn of Africa until 30 June 2018. The EUSR contributes actively to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development within and among the countries in the region. This includes support for political, security and economic regional cooperation and early warning of potential conflicts in the region. The Council allocated a budget of EUR 3.4 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure relating to the EUSR's mandate.

EU Special Representative for Central Asia

The Council extended the mandate of EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Central Asia Peter Burian until 30 June 2018. The EUSR promotes overall EU political coordination in Central Asia and helps to ensure the consistency of the EU's external actions in the region. The EUSR also contributes to strengthening cooperation, democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Central Asia. The Council allocated a budget of EUR 1.195 million for the period from 1 March 2017 to 30 June 2018 to cover the expenditure relating to the EUSR's mandate.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Cooperation between ESA and SATCEN

The Council approved an administrative arrangement between the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Union Satellite Centre (SATCEN) to formalise their cooperation. The arrangement will enable further collaboration between the two organisations, seeking in particular to improve synergies between space and security activities. Specific collaboration could include working together on the interpretation of satellite images, in turn enabling a better understanding of migratory flows or better visualisation of war-impacted areas, such as Palmyra.

[EU must be a space power, says High Representative Mogherini - 24 January 2017](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Derivatives - Delegated acts

The Council decided not to object to Commission regulations:

- amending Regulation 648/2012 on over-the-counter derivative financial instruments, central counterparties and trade repositories as regards the extension of transitional periods related to pension scheme arrangements ([5772/17](#) + [15761/16](#));
- correcting Regulation 2016/2251 supplementing Regulation 648/2012 with regard to regulatory technical standards for risk-mitigation techniques for over-the-counter derivative contracts not cleared by a central counterparty ([5773/17](#) + [5511/17](#)).

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

BUDGETS**Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for the Netherlands**

The Council adopted a decision mobilising €1.82 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) to provide support for 1 096 dismissed workers made redundant in six Dutch companies operating in the retail sector. The redundancies are the result of the continued financial and economic crisis.

The EGF helps workers to find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved outside the EU, or as a result of the global financial and economic crisis. The help of the EGF consists in co-financing measures such as job-search assistance, careers advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promoting entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**Europol**

The Council adopted an implementing decision amending Decision 2009/935/JHA as regards the list of third states and organisations with which Europol shall conclude agreements. This implementing decision includes Denmark in the list of third states and organisations with which Europol shall conclude agreements ([15778/16](#)).

Schengen evaluation - Greece

The Council adopted three implementing decisions setting out recommendations on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2016 evaluation of Greece on the application of the Schengen acquis in the fields of the common visa policy, management of the external border and the Schengen Information System ([6352/17](#), [6353/17](#) and [6354/17](#)).

Schengen evaluation - Croatia

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2016 evaluation of Croatia with a view to fulfilling the conditions necessary for the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of the common visa policy ([6359/17](#)).

Schengen evaluation - Italy

The Council adopted three implementing decisions setting out recommendations on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2016 evaluation of Italy on the application of the Schengen acquis in the fields of data protection, management of the external border and return ([6355/17](#), [6357/17](#) and [6358/17](#)).
