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Subject: Developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training
- *Council conclusions (30 May 2016)*

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training, as adopted by the Council at its 3471st meeting on 30 and 31 May 2016.

Council conclusions
on
developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

- Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which states that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

- The Paris Declaration, adopted on 17 March 2015¹, which highlights the importance of *strengthening children's and young people's ability to think critically and exercise judgement so that, particularly in the context of the Internet and social media, they are able to grasp realities, to distinguish fact from opinion, to recognise propaganda and to resist all forms of indoctrination and hate speech;*

¹ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.

- The ET2020 Joint Report of 15 December 2015², which designates the follow-up to the Paris Declaration as a key priority in the new work cycle (2015-2020) through *joint analysis, peer learning, meetings, dissemination of good practices and concrete measures underpinned by funding*;
- The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 24 February 2016 on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education³, which contains the commitment *to enhance young people's digital and media literacy as well as their ability to think critically, along with their social skills and citizenship competences*;

AND IN THE LIGHT OF

- The Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning⁴, which identifies as key competences that all citizens should acquire: '*digital competence*', which requires *a critical and reflective attitude towards available information and a responsible use of the interactive media*; '*social and civic competences*' which include the ability to *understand different viewpoints and a readiness to respect the values of others*; and '*cultural awareness and expression*' which encompass *a sense of identity as the basis for an open attitude towards and respect for diversity*;

² OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, pp. 25-35.

³ OJ C 105, 19.3.2016, pp. 1-4.

⁴ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, pp. 10-18.

- The Council conclusions of November 2012 on the European strategy for a Better Internet for Children⁵, which underline that *the education sector as well as parents have an important role to play in helping children to exploit opportunities offered by the Internet in a beneficial and creative way, as well as identify and deal with risks encountered on the Internet and that teachers and parents themselves need support and training not only to keep up with the fast and unpredictable changes in children's virtual lives, but also the constantly evolving new technologies*;
- The Commission communication of January 2014 on preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism⁶, which singles out *closer cooperation with civil society and private sector to address challenges faced online and stepping up efforts to encourage young people to think critically about extremist messages* among the main actions to be taken to prevent radicalisation;
- The Council conclusions of November 2014 on European Audiovisual Policy in the Digital Era⁷, which invite the Commission and the Member States to *promote good practices and research on the inclusion of media literacy in formal education and training, as well as in non-formal and informal learning*;

⁵ OJ C 393, 19.12.2012, pp. 11-14.

⁶ Doc. 5451/14.

⁷ OJ C 433, 3.12.2014, pp. 2-5.

- The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the role of the youth sector in an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to preventing and combating violent radicalisation of young people, which invite the Member States and the Commission to support young people in *countering extremist influences on the internet and in social media* and in developing *critical thinking and the relevant knowledge, skills and competences to understand the different sources and agendas behind the information provided, including propaganda and hate speech*⁸;

CONSIDERS THAT

The internet - and social media in particular - offer unprecedented, almost limitless opportunities in terms of sharing knowledge and ideas. By providing instant access to vast amounts of information, as well as access to a wide range of sources, they can have a significant impact on opinions, attitudes and perceptions. They also offer everyone a platform to create, share and publish content themselves, thus helping to unlock talent, foster creativity and promote innovation.

Today's world is characterised by easy and continuous access to the internet, with people, especially the young, spending more and more time online.⁹ Virtual communities and contacts - notably via social media and instant messaging services - are growing in importance.

⁸ Doc. 9640/16.

⁹ More than half of all Europeans use social networks; the majority of those users are young. 84% of European under 30 use social media and the younger the age group, the closer this percentage approaches 100%.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, ALSO NOTES THAT

Media literacy - that is, all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with both traditional and new forms of media¹⁰ - is of increasing importance. It is closely related to active engagement in democratic life, to citizenship and the ability to exercise judgment critically and independently as well as to reflect on one's own actions, and can thereby enhance young people's resilience in the face of extremist messages and disinformation.

Digital competence, which encompasses the confident, creative and critical use of ICT, is a crucial component of media literacy. A low level of digital competence can leave a person at a disadvantage, not just on the labour market where almost all jobs require some level of digital competence, but also in society at large. As such, there is a clear link between enhancing digital competence and efforts to create more inclusive and cohesive societies.

Media literacy - linked to literacy and communication skills in general - also involves other key competences, notably *social and civic competences* which have a clear link to critical thinking, ensuring that people can value diversity and respect the views and values of others, but also *cultural awareness and expression* which are underpinned by the ability to relate one's own way of expressing points of view to those of others, including those with different cultural backgrounds.

¹⁰ These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking, while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process. The concept covers different media: broadcasting, video, radio, press, through various channels: traditional, internet, social media and addresses the needs of all ages.

ACKNOWLEDGES THAT

While digital competence is increasingly becoming indispensable, an alarmingly high number of people still lack a basic level of digital competence¹¹, putting them at risk of unemployment and social exclusion. This can contribute to creating a ‘digital divide’, which can lead to social and economic inequalities and which poses a clear challenge to our education and training systems.

As well as the many benefits and opportunities which they can bring, the internet and social media also present potential threats and dangers, most notably by making available online content that is inappropriate or even harmful for children and young people, including hate speech and content that trivialises violence. Other unwelcome phenomena include online grooming and cyber-bullying, which can significantly affect the well-being and development of children, as well as have a negative impact on their educational performance.

The recent terrorist attacks in Europe and other incidents of violent extremism have raised particular concerns about the unparalleled possibilities that the internet and social media provide for extremist groups of all kinds to spread hatred and violence-inciting messages freely and to find an audience among disaffected youth. Radicalisation of the kind leading to violence often has a transnational dimension, whereby networks of extremists engage with vulnerable youth, regardless of borders. While it is unlikely that increasing educational attainment would stop all forms of violent extremism, education and training can and should contribute to preventing radicalisation.

¹¹ In the EU, 40% of citizens have no or low digital skills, whereas around 90% of jobs are estimated to need at least some level of digital skills in the EU. Acquiring those skills is thus rapidly becoming a precondition for workers to become and remain employable.

AGREES THAT

As part of their overall mission to prepare young people for society and the labour market, as well as to support them in achieving personal fulfilment, education and training have an important role to play in helping young people to become media literate and responsible citizens of the future.

One key element of education and training's mission is to instil in young people fundamental values such as those enshrined in the Treaty on European Union and to develop and maintain an open and inquiring mindset, while being able to think independently and critically, to exercise sound judgment using fact-based knowledge and to resist and counter extremist messages, indoctrination and disinformation.

To remain relevant, it is crucial that education and training staff at all levels keep pace with these rapid developments and provide learners with the competences - knowledge, skills and attitudes – and values needed to access, interpret, produce and use information and other media content, notably in the context of the internet and social media, in a safe and responsible manner.

Comprehensive "whole school" approaches involving the entire school community as well as other relevant stakeholders can be of great importance, since learning to use the internet and social media responsibly often takes place outside the classroom in non-formal and informal settings.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO

1. Encourage sufficient attention to be paid to developing media literacy and critical thinking in education and training at all levels, including through citizenship and media education.
2. Seek to increase digital competence levels among learners of all ages, in a lifelong learning perspective, as an important precondition for strengthening their ability to participate actively in the democratic life of our modern societies as well as for enhancing their employability.
3. Consider using, alongside national frameworks and tools, the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, the Council of Europe's Framework of Competences of Democratic Culture and the UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework.
4. Encourage socially safe learning environments, both online and offline, in which controversial issues can be openly discussed and freedom of speech preserved, and empower teaching staff to initiate and moderate such discussions.
5. Support teaching staff and school leaders at all levels of education and training in developing through initial training and continuous professional development their own digital competence, as well as the pedagogical skills needed to use new technologies and open educational resources in their teaching and to address the issues of media literacy and critical thinking in an effective manner with learners of all ages and backgrounds.

6. Engage with parents and other stakeholders in society at large, with a view to reducing the digital gap between generations and fostering a shared culture of dialogue and mutual understanding.
7. Reinforce dialogue, cooperation and partnerships between the education and training sector and the media sector – including journalists - as well as all other relevant stakeholders, including civil society and youth organisations, given that the effective development of media literacy and critical thinking calls for a multi-disciplinary approach and recalling the important role that non-formal and informal learning can play in this regard.
8. Encourage innovative, creative and participative ways of developing media literacy and critical thinking in education and training, for instance by carrying out research and by exploring the potential that culture and arts, intercultural approaches and school media production can offer, as a means of strengthening openness towards other cultures and active citizenship.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES, TO

1. In the context of the ET2020 strategic framework, continue to promote peer learning, including through the collection and dissemination of good practices in the field of media literacy and critical thinking, while paying special attention to effectively reaching out to disadvantaged learners and those at risk of marginalisation.
2. Ensure policy coherence at EU level in the area of media literacy, so that the expert work being carried out in the various relevant policy areas, such as education, youth, culture and audio-visual policy, as well as in the area of counter-terrorism, is complementary, while taking into account the specificities of the education and training sector.

3. Support efforts to equip teaching staff with the skills and tools needed to address the issues of media literacy and critical thinking in an effective manner with learners of all ages and backgrounds, *inter alia* by using the School Education Gateway and by promoting peer-to-peer learning via the e-Twinning platform.
4. Continue to cooperate with, and take into account the work done by, other multilateral fora, such as the Council of Europe¹², UNESCO and the OECD, since the challenges cross borders and affect countries both inside and outside the European Union.
5. Encourage use of the funding opportunities offered by all relevant EU funds and programmes - notably Erasmus+, the Connecting Europe Facility, the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, Creative Europe and Europe for Citizens - to support these efforts.

¹² Notably in the context of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021, as adopted on 2 March 2016 by the Committee of Ministers, which addresses the issue of protecting and promoting the rights of the child in the digital environment.