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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Preparation of the May EYCS Council policy debate on 'Building the future of Europe: the contribution of education to strengthening social cohesion'
- *Policy debate*
(*Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure*)
[proposed by the Presidency]

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached discussion paper, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 22 - 23 May 2019.

Building the future of Europe: the contribution of education and training to strengthening social cohesion

Presidency discussion paper

On 14 November 2017 the Social Summit held in Gothenburg, Sweden, was devoted to the role of education and culture. On that occasion, the Commission presented a vision for a European Education Area by 2025. In this context, the European Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017¹ recognised education and culture as being *'key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness'*. At the same time, the European Council called for the Commission, the Council and the Member States to examine possible measures addressing *'the need for an inclusive, lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training'*. In follow-up, the two education packages proposed by the Commission put in place the main orientations for the European Education Area.

Assuming its steering role in this domain, the Council on 22 May 2018 adopted conclusions² on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area. The conclusions started by recalling the social dimension of education and highlighting the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that allow full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market.

¹ EUCO 19/1/18 REV 1.

² OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p.7.

The Council further underlined the crucial role of education and culture in bringing Europeans together and their importance for the future of individuals as well as for the Union as a whole. It invited the Member States to continue reflecting on a shared vision of a European Education Area and its links with the post-2020 strategic framework for cooperation in education and training, underlining that the current framework (ET 2020) has provided a valuable basis for setting up common priorities and supporting Member States in modernising their education and training systems.

Likewise, the Commission's Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture³, while setting out the vision of a European Education Area, also stressed the key role of education and culture as the best vectors for strengthening our European identity and gaining a better understanding of what it means to be European. Our traditions, history and cultural heritage, which are the main essence of who we are as a civilization, are strong foundations which we should build upon as a Union. Getting to know each other better, while standing together around the principles of democracy and solidarity, can help us to build a sustainable and secure future for Europe.

Education and training institutions are where society, community and family meet. In its work on 'Inclusion and Citizenship', the European Education and Training Expert Panel (tasked with supporting the preparation of the post-2020 strategic framework for cooperation in education and training) highlighted the role of schools as community spaces, acting as a connecting point between different communities and services, such as health and welfare.

³ COM(2017) 673 final.

The above-mentioned report also acknowledged the value of tolerance and inclusion in the context of citizenship education, particularly from the perspective of countering populist and extremist worldviews. At their meeting in Timisoara on 1-2 April, Directors-General for Schools discussed ‘Opening schools to Europe’ as a sizeable opportunity for us all – decision-makers, teachers, and school leaders – to contribute to the future of the Union by ensuring that EU values and democratic principles remain at the core of our education systems. Participants underlined the importance of teaching practices, participatory learning environments and democratic decision-making processes in schools. In the same vein, the ‘European Universities’ initiative, which is a key building block of the European Education Area and a game-changer for the higher education landscape in Europe, is built upon a strong combination of excellence and inclusion, both in geographic and social terms, while also furthering EU identity.

The Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching⁴ highlights the need *‘to increase the sharing of the common values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union from an early age and at all levels and types of education and training in a lifelong learning perspective to strengthen social cohesion and a positive and inclusive common sense of belonging at local, regional, national and Union level’*. The Recommendation states that promoting inclusive education for all learners could be achieved notably by: *‘including all learners in quality education from early childhood and throughout life; providing the necessary support to all learners according to their particular needs, including those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those from a migrant background, those with special needs and the most talented learners; facilitating the transition between various educational pathways and levels and enabling the provision of adequate educational and career guidance’*.

⁴ OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p.1.

During the Bulgarian and Austrian presidencies, the Council adopted the Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, the Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area and the Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

The Council Recommendations on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages and on high-quality early childhood and care systems, which are on the agenda for adoption by this Council, after exactly one year from the proposals put forward by the European Commission, provide concrete guidance on promoting inclusive learning settings and outcomes.

In light of the above, Ministers are asked to reflect on the development of the European Education Area by 2025, in particular with respect to strengthening social cohesion. In this context, the following guiding questions are put forward:

Questions

- 1. Which are the necessary next steps in European cooperation in education and training in order to achieve the objective of creating the European Education Area by 2025?*
- 2. What are the most successful projects or practices in your country promoting a learning culture based on common values and strengthening social cohesion? How can cooperation in education and training at European level strengthen such a learning culture among learners of all ages?*