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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
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Subject:	Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area

Delegations will find in the annex the conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area, adopted by the Council at its 3617th meeting held on 22 May 2018.

Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

recalling the political background to this issue as set out in Annex to these conclusions,

RECALLING that

1. the social dimension of education as stated in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights 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.
2. in the context of the Social Summit in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017, the Leaders' Agenda was devoted to education and culture. Political support was established for a number of specific work strands, mainly on the basis of the Commission communication on 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture' that presented the idea to work together, in full respect of subsidiarity, towards a shared vision of a European Education Area based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth, to be established by 2025.
3. as a follow-up to the Gothenburg Summit, the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 placed education high on the European political agenda and created momentum for achieving significant progress in this field.

CONSIDERS that

4. education and culture are crucial in bringing Europeans together and for the future of individuals as well as for the Union as a whole. All Europeans should be able to benefit from the diverse common cultural and educational heritage.

5. a European Education Area should be underpinned by the life-long learning continuum, from early childhood education and care through school and vocational education and training to higher education and adult education.
6. a European Education Area should promote and foster mobility and cooperation in education and training and support Member States in modernising their education and training systems.
7. UNDERLINES that the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) has provided a valuable basis for setting up common priorities and supporting Member States in modernising their education and training systems.
8. INVITES Member States to continue reflecting on a shared vision of a European Education Area, including its possible goals, objectives and scope, and its links with the post-2020 strategic framework for cooperation in education and training. The follow-up to ET 2020, through increased cooperation between Member States and with the support of the Commission, should promote mutual learning and support further efforts and steps towards making the vision of a European Education Area a reality. In order to progress the vision of a European Education Area, particular attention should be paid to the following topics:
9. ERASMUS+
 - 9.1. STRESSES that the Erasmus+ programme is a highly successful flagship initiative of the EU, which boosts learning mobility throughout Europe and beyond, and makes a significant contribution to improving personal development and intercultural competences and strengthening the European identity; it underpins EU-wide cooperation between education and training institutions of all levels; it also increases the EU's competitiveness; and enhances the promotion of common European values.

- 9.2. WELCOMES the results of the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ and CALLS for measures to strengthen and widen participation, continue focusing on the impact and quality of projects, foster high quality education and training and make access to the next-generation Erasmus+ programme more inclusive and equitable, for example by reinforcing equal opportunities and enhancing access to the programme for underrepresented regions and groups, first time applicants and organisations with smaller capacity throughout all parts of the programme. Synergies with other European Union funding sources could be reinforced, while overlaps should be avoided.
- 9.3. CALLS for further simplification of the rules and procedures in order to further reduce the administrative burden at all levels.

10. DIGITAL SKILLS AND EDUCATION

- 10.1. UNDERLINES the importance of improving learning and teaching in the digital age and of promoting the development of digital competence, one of the key competences for lifelong learning, by paying special attention to the Sofia Call for Action on Digital Skills and Education and to the Commission communication on the Digital Education Action Plan.
- 10.2. HIGHLIGHTS that the next-generation Erasmus+ programme and other relevant Union funding programmes should support the adaptation of education and training systems and infrastructure to the digital age.

10.3. CALLS UPON THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, ACTING
WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES, TO:

- 10.3.1. Support the modernisation of education and training systems through innovation, including by making a pedagogical and innovative use of digital technologies and approaches that support the quality and inclusive nature of education and training and through appropriate use of relevant EU funding programmes and tools, including the voluntary SELFIE self-assessment tool, encourage initiatives and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders to further develop education and training, to include digital skills in all teaching and learning.
- 10.3.2. Take concrete measures to promote the development of digital competences and media literacy skills among all Europeans in order to build resilience to disinformation, propaganda and filter bubbles and to equip all citizens, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the skills they need to use digital technologies and the internet for their own well-being and for civic participation.
- 10.3.3. Stimulate education that fosters creativity and entrepreneurship as well as, where appropriate and in accordance with existing legal provisions, foster cooperation between education and business and the civil society for the upskilling and reskilling of learners and educators including for example the development of digital skills training programmes. Acknowledges the work by the Intellectual Property in Education network managed by the European Union Intellectual Property Office.

11. HIGHER EDUCATION

- 11.1. RECALLS specific challenges for Europe's higher education sector as set out in the November 2017 Council Conclusions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education.
- 11.2. RECOGNISES the proven added value of Erasmus+ learning mobility and strategic partnerships across the Union, in fostering higher education cooperation as well as initiatives such as the European Institute of Technology and Innovation and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions.
- 11.3. RECOGNISES the importance of strengthening strategic collaboration between higher education institutions in Europe through a bottom-up, flexible, unbureaucratic, inclusive, open and transparent approach.
- 11.4. SUPPORTS the emergence of 'European Universities', consisting of sustainable bottom-up networks that are geographically and socially inclusive and work seamlessly across borders, and which could play a flagship role in the creation of a European Education Area as a whole, contributing to empower new generations of European citizens and to strengthen the international competitiveness of higher education in Europe.
- CONSIDERS that 'European Universities' have the potential to significantly enhance mobility and foster high quality and excellence in education and research, by strengthening the link between teaching, research and innovation and knowledge transfer, by demonstrating the benefits of multilingual learning, the recognition of qualifications and by developing joint education and research programmes and projects.

- 11.5. INVITES THE COMMISSION, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE, AND IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE MEMBER STATES to develop and establish the key objectives and concept of 'European Universities' as well as support their development. TAKES NOTE that the Commission has set up an Ad-hoc Expert Group composed of experts from the Member States for this purpose. TAKES NOTE that the selection criteria for the pilot phase of 'European Universities' will be developed following the procedures stipulated in the Erasmus+ Regulation¹.
- 11.6. INVITES the Commission to report regularly to the Council on the progress in developing the selection criteria for piloting 'European Universities'. CALLS on the Commission together with the Member States and based on the outcomes of the pilot project, to reflect on the future shape of 'European Universities'.
- 11.7. STRESSES that university-business cooperation is instrumental in fostering the EU's competitiveness, as well as its economic and social growth. ACKNOWLEDGES the contribution of the European University-Business Forum. HIGHLIGHTS the need for continuous support to university-business partnerships to fuel their potential to innovate, research and develop innovative pedagogies.
- 11.8. INVITES the Member States to foster measures, with the support of the Commission, to enhance the entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities of higher education institutions, including through the use of the HEInnovate self-assessment tool.
- 11.9. CALLS on the Commission in close cooperation with the Member States and based on the outcomes of the pilot project, to explore the possibility of creating a voluntary European Student Card, which should contribute to improved learning mobility by ensuring better services for students and reduced administration for higher education institutions.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013, OJ L347 of 20.12.2013, p. 50.

12. HIGH QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- 12.1. RECALLS that the European Pillar of Social Rights states that all children have the right to affordable and good quality early childhood education and care. UNDERLINES that the efforts should be intensified towards reaching the priorities set out in the 2011 Council conclusions on early childhood education and care and towards providing all children, including those from socio-economically disadvantaged regions, as well as those from all socio-economic backgrounds, access to early childhood education and care systems.
- 12.2. UNDERLINES the need to ensure high quality and inclusive education to support the development of all learners, including by focussing on the priorities set out in the November 2017 Council conclusions on school development and excellent teaching.
- 12.3. HIGHLIGHTS the need to promote the attractiveness and importance of the teacher profession and that of other educational staff and support their continuous upskilling. Even though many of the jobs of the future are still unknown, this profession is among those that will retain its central role for society in an era of crosscutting technological innovation and artificial intelligence. In this regard, mobility of teachers and educational staff, as well as better communication between the responsible bodies for their training, should be promoted.
- 12.4. STRESSES that it is key to join forces to reduce early school leaving in Europe and increase the opportunities for equal access to education and basic skills for all vulnerable groups, including the children of workers who relocate to another Member State for shorter or longer periods.
- 12.5. NOTES the difficulties children and pupils could encounter when returning to their home country's education system after periods abroad in cases of insufficient communication between the national educational systems.

12.6. INVITES the Member States, with the support of the Commission, where appropriate, to explore ways of improving the exchange of information on pupils' educational status in cases of mobility, while respecting Union law on protection of personal data.

13. LANGUAGE LEARNING

13.1. RECOGNISES multilingual competence as an important building block of a European Education Area. STRESSES that languages play a key role in fostering understanding and diversity, as well as promoting European values, and are essential for personal development, mobility and participation in society and employability.

13.2. RECALLS the ambition expressed by the European Council in its conclusions of December 2017 with respect to language learning.

13.3. RECALLS the May 2014 Council conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences that called on Member States to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and at enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching.

14. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS²

- 14.1. CONSIDERS the recognition of higher education and secondary level education qualifications, including VET qualifications, as well as the recognition of the outcomes of learning periods abroad, as important building blocks of a European Education Area through their contribution to the seamless mobility of learners across the Union as a whole.
- 14.2. EMPHASISES the importance of cooperation between education and training systems, education and training providers and other stakeholders for developing and implementing policies, as well as contributing to trust through quality assurance and improved evaluation procedures.
- 14.3. RECALLS that the second indent of Article 165(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union calls upon the Union to encourage the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study building upon the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region and its subsidiary texts with a view to fostering mobility of students and teachers; FULLY RESPECTS the responsibilities and competences of the Member States in this area and STRESSES that the proposed solutions at Union level should be based on transparency and trust, and should take into account the specificities of the educational systems of the Member States.

Additionally STRESSES

15. that initiatives included in the concept and future actions to be proposed and undertaken as a part of a European Education Area need to ensure complementarity and coherence with respect to national education and training systems and should include all levels and types of education and training, including adult education and vocational education and training.

² Qualifications as defined in Article I of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (i.e. higher education qualification; and qualification giving access to higher education).

Political Background

1. Council conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools (21 November 2008).
2. Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET2020') (12 May 2009).
3. Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle (26 November 2009).
4. Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (19 and 20 May 2011).
5. Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education (28 and 29 November 2011).
6. Council conclusions on the social dimension of higher education (16 and 17 May 2013).
7. Council conclusions on the global dimension of European higher education (25 and 26 November 2013).
8. Council conclusions on effective leadership in education (25 and 26 November 2013).
9. Council conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences (20 May 2014).
10. Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris, 17 March 2015).
11. Council conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence (18 and 19 May 2015).
12. 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) — New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (23 and 24 November 2015).

13. Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (23 and 24 November 2015).
14. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016 (24 February 2016).
15. Council conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training (30 May 2016).
16. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A new skills agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (10 June 2016).
17. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Improving and modernising education (7 December 2016).
18. Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (19 December 2016)
19. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) (31 January 2018).
20. Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all (17 February 2017).
21. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture: The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017.

22. Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (20 November 2017).
 23. Council conclusions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education (20 November 2017).
 24. Council conclusions on school development and excellent teaching (20 November 2017).
 25. Conclusions of the European Council (14 December 2017).
 26. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan (17 January 2018).
 27. Council Recommendation on a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (15 March 2018).
 28. Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching (22 May 2018).
 29. Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (22 May 2018).
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