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NOTE

from: Permanent Representatives' Committee (Part I)
to: Council EPSCO

Subject: European Alliance for Apprenticeships
- *Draft Council Declaration*

Delegations will find attached a draft Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, as prepared by the Social Questions Working Party in cooperation with the Education Committee and the Youth Working Party.

The Council (EPSCO) is invited to adopt the attached Declaration.

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

Draft Council Declaration

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (hereafter, the Alliance) was successfully launched in Leipzig on 2 July 2013 with a Joint Declaration by the European Social Partners, the European Commission and the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, and with a number of pledges by businesses, industry, chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and youth representatives.

The Council of the European Union expresses its strong commitment to combating youth unemployment and inactivity and invites all relevant actors to take full account of this priority in the implementation of their economic, social, education and training policies, whilst noting that high-quality apprenticeships and other work-based learning schemes are effective instruments to improve sustainable transitions from school to work, notably by fostering skills that are relevant to the labour market and improving skill matches. It welcomes the agreed objectives regarding the implementation of the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee and the contribution of apprenticeships to this purpose;

The Council AGREES on the following key messages:

- (1) Tackling very high levels of youth unemployment requires comprehensive and complementary action at national and EU level.
- (2) High-quality apprenticeship schemes can make a positive contribution to combating youth unemployment by fostering skills acquisition and securing smooth and sustainable transitions from the education and training system to the labour market. Such schemes are particularly effective when embedded in a comprehensive approach at national level that combines education, training and employment measures.

- (3) Where appropriate and according to national circumstances, the effectiveness and attractiveness of apprenticeship schemes should be encouraged by their adherence to several common guiding principles. Amongst these, the following can be particularly highlighted:
- (a) Establishing an appropriate regulatory framework, whereby the responsibilities, rights and obligations of each party involved are clearly formulated and are enforceable.
 - (b) Encouraging national partnerships with social partners in the design, implementation and governance of apprenticeship schemes, together with other relevant stakeholders such as, where appropriate, intermediary bodies (chambers of commerce, industries and crafts, professional and sectorial organisations), education and training providers, youth and student organisations, and local, regional as well as national authorities.
 - (c) Ensuring adequate integration of the apprenticeship schemes into the formal education and training system through a system of recognised qualifications and competences which may allow access to higher education and life-long learning.
 - (d) Ensuring that the qualifications and competences gained and the learning process of apprenticeships are of high quality with defined standards for learning outcomes and quality assurance, in line with the Recommendation on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET¹, and that the apprenticeship model is recognised as a valuable learning tool, transferable across borders, opening up the route to progress within national qualifications frameworks and aspiration to high-skilled jobs.
 - (e) Including a strong work-based high-quality learning and training component, which should complement the specific on-the-job skills with broader, transversal and transferable skills, ensuring that participants can adapt to change after finishing the apprenticeship.

¹ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p.1.

- (f) Involving both employers and public authorities sufficiently in the funding of apprenticeship schemes, whilst ensuring adequate remuneration and social protection of apprentices, and providing appropriate incentives for all actors to participate, especially small and medium sized enterprises, and for an adequate supply of apprenticeship places to be made available.
- (g) Covering multiple sectors and occupations, including new and innovative sectors with a high employment potential, and taking into account forecasts of future skills needs.
- (h) Facilitating the participation of young people with fewer opportunities by providing career guidance, preparatory training and other targeted support.
- (i) Promoting apprenticeship schemes through awareness-raising targeted at young people, their parents, education and training providers, employers and public employment services, while highlighting apprenticeships as a pathway leading to excellence which opens up broad educational and professional opportunities.
- (j) Including apprenticeships as one of the options for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee schemes.

As a further contribution to high-quality apprenticeships and other work-based learning schemes, in particular the Alliance, the Member States declare that, where appropriate, they:

- (4) Make a pledge that describes their intended actions to increase the supply, quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships.
- (5) Undertake VET system reforms, in cooperation with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, by introducing an apprenticeship pathway or improving existing schemes, in line with the above-mentioned guiding principles, in order to increase the number, quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships.

- (6) Pay particular attention to supporting SMEs, allowing them to offer more and better quality apprenticeship places, for example through appropriate financial and non-financial incentives.
- (7) Take steps to recognise qualifications acquired through apprenticeships within national qualifications frameworks and to reference them in the European Qualifications Framework to facilitate cross-border mobility opportunities. This should be implemented in accordance with national legislation and practice.
- (8) Envisage strategic use of EU funds, including the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Erasmus+ programme, to support the establishment of effective apprenticeship schemes.
- (9) Continue to exchange best practices and experiences on apprenticeship schemes, including within the multilateral surveillance process of the European Semester, the Mutual Learning Programme, and the Copenhagen Process, and via the Open Method of Coordination used under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020).