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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3296th Council meeting

### **Education, Youth, Culture and Sport**

Brussels, 24 February 2014

President            **Konstantinos ARVANITOPOULOS**  
Minister of Education and Religious Affairs

# **P R E S S**

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## Main results of the Council

*The Council adopted conclusions **on innovative education and training to invest in skills**, in the context of the European Semester and in particular the education aspects of the 2014 Annual Growth Survey. The conclusions call for action to improve skills performance across the EU and to help protect investment in education and training as areas which can both foster and support growth.*

*The Council also held a policy debate on **skills and employability** in the light of the results of recent OECD surveys (PIAAC and PISA). Ministers indicated some of the concrete measures that have been taken or planned at national level to make education and training policies more responsive to the changing needs of the labour market and how the EU could best contribute to supporting those efforts through policy cooperation and funding instruments.*

*Minister ARVANITOPOULOS underlined that "member states should continue to invest in high quality education. They also need to accelerate the reform agenda in education and training to urgently address the challenge of skills mismatch which is one of the causes of young people unemployment".*

### Other issues

*The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending regulation 1031/2010, in particular to determine the volumes of **greenhouse gas emission allowances to be auctioned in 2013-2020** ("back-loading"). The measure will enable the Commission to delay the auctioning of 900 million allowances in the third trading period of the EU's emissions trading system (EU ETS) to address the surplus of emission allowances that has built up in the system, mainly as a result of the economic crisis. See [press release](#).*

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- <sup>1</sup>
- 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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**Commission:**

Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

Member

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**ITEMS DEBATED****Investing in skills**

The Council adopted conclusions on **efficient and innovative education and training to invest in skills - supporting the 2014 European Semester** ([6285/14](#)), which focus primarily on the need for education and training systems across the EU to improve skills performance in order to ensure that young people and low-skilled adults acquire the kind of skills and competences relevant to today's labour market

The conclusions call in particular for a more innovative approach to education and training, notably by incorporating digital forms of learning into mainstream education, as well as urging member states to make full use of the new generation of financial instruments, in particular the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The conclusions are also a first response to the education-related messages of the 2014 Annual Growth Survey ([15803/13](#)+ *ADD 1*), as well as to the findings of two recent OECD surveys, PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) and PIAAC (*Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*). They also address messages in the recent Council declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships ([14986/13](#)) and in the Council recommendation establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>1</sup>

The Commission recalled that its communication on Opening up Education ([14116/13](#) + [14116/13](#) *ADD1*) sets out a strategy for modernising education and training systems, in particular by integrating new technologies and open educational resources.

The Commission also underlined that investing in education and training is crucial to reducing the skills gap and thereby helping to combat unemployment. This will pay off in the long term in terms of growth and jobs, but the Commission also expressed concern that education budgets are stagnating or even decreasing in some member states.

Furthermore, it invited member states to take advantage of the forthcoming call for tenders in the framework of Erasmus + for policy experimentation, which include in particular projects related to evaluation of skills in schools, entrepreneurial skills, low-skilled adult training and youth volunteering activities.

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<sup>1</sup> (*OJ C 120, 26.4.2013*)

Member states agreed in general with the main messages of the conclusions and, in particular, on the urgent need to speed up the reform of education and training systems, as well as to explore new forms of digital learning. Some member states also underlined the importance of the Connected Europe package in this context.

Several member states recalled that teachers remain an essential element for educational success and underlined the importance of teacher training, pointing out that digital tools are a means and not an end in themselves.

The Commission stressed that the EU is still lagging behind its EU 2020 goals in education and that although the problem in skills supply has been aggravated by the financial crisis, the crisis is not the reason for the skills mismatch.



## **Enhancing employability**

As a complement to the conclusions, ministers held a policy debate **on skills and employability in the light of the PIAAC and PISA results**, which show poor performance in mathematics of 15-year olds across the EU, while the PIAAC survey indicates that one in five European adults has low literacy and numeracy rates, but also that one in four cannot make proper use of a computer. These findings are confirmed by the Commission's own analysis of EU data<sup>1</sup>

Ministers were therefore invited to indicate some of the concrete measures that had been taken or planned at national level to make education policies more responsive to the changing needs of the labour market and how the EU could best contribute to supporting those efforts through policy cooperation and funding instruments.

With a view to making the debate more open and interactive, the Presidency invited two guest speakers with expertise in this field: Prof. Frank VANDENBROUCKE, former Belgian Federal minister and professor of Economics at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and Frank-Jürgen WEISE, Head of the German Public Employment Service.

Professor Vandembroucke drew attention to the significant disparities in EU education levels which are not sustainable in the medium and long term. He also expressed the view that there is no direct correlation between the PISA results and employment figures, but said that, while recognising the need to try and provide for a “high-skilled” workforce through increased participation in tertiary education, there was also a need to ensure that we have a “well-skilled” workforce at the other end of the labour market. Everyone needs to be equipped with basic skills, as well as transversal skills, such as communication and digital competence.

Mr. Vandembroucke also recalled that expenditure on education was lower in 2011 than in 2008 in several member states although he also acknowledged that spending is no guarantee of a better education system. He underlined that we cannot achieve European education goals without enough financial resources but that money should be spent with maximum efficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Education & Training Monitor 2013  
([http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor13\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor13_en.pdf))

During his intervention, Mr. Weise acknowledged the need to address the problem of skills mismatch and called for effective action in reducing early school leaving . He also called on member states to make the best use of the Youth guarantee.

He recalled the German apprenticeships programmes which have contributed to successful transitions between education and the world of work. He also underlined the need to value manual work and the importance of increasing lifelong and vocational training programmes. The mobility of workers should also be encouraged and social skills promoted.

Member states agreed in general that education and training have a strategic role to play in supporting economic recovery in Europe.

Most member states acknowledged the importance of the OECD surveys since they not only provided a clear indication of national situations, but also allowed for the exchange of best practices in order to overcome common problems. Several ministers considered that there should be a shared European ambition in the field of education.

They also agreed that it is crucial to foster links between education systems and the business world, notably by increasing good quality apprenticeships .Many member states underlined the need to further vocational training and several of them pointed out that a change in thinking is also required since a lot of parents still considered this option as "second best".

Several ministers once again stressed the importance of teachers and of investing in teacher training, as well as developing all key competences, in particular reading, maths and language competences, but also digital, social and creative competences.

Member states insisted that in times of financial difficulties, education reforms must be tailor-made and spending should be efficient and effective.

The Commission recalled that although one of the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy was that 40% of the population should have tertiary education by 2020 and that 35% of jobs in future will require high skills, this did not imply that basic skills and transversal competences should be neglected.

Commissioner Vassiliou also invited member states to make the best use of the Alliance for Apprenticeships and of the many possibilities available under the new Erasmus+ programme, including the knowledge and sector skills alliances.

The outcome of the debate in the Education Council will be forwarded by the Presidency to the Spring European Council of 20-21 March and will form part of the synthesis reports from the sectoral Councils directly involved in Europe 2020.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### ***– Bullying and School Violence***

The Council took note of information from the Presidency concerning a proposal from the European Parliament to establish a European Day against Bullying and School Violence ([6540/14](#)). The Presidency invited the Commission and the member states to consider supporting such an initiative.

The Commission agreed that this is a very serious problem that needed to be addressed as soon as possible, but was also of the view that other kinds of initiatives at national and European level could be more effective.

### ***– Keeping Young People in Employment, Education and/or Training***

The Council took note of information from the Romanian delegation concerning a conference on the subject “Keeping Young People in Employment, Education and/or Training” that will take place in Bucharest on 10-11 March 2014, aiming to create effective learning partnerships for policy development in this area ([6188/14](#)).

It will bring together relevant public authorities and international organisations, representatives of academic and business sectors from the EU, EFTA, the Western Balkans, Turkey, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as representatives from countries participating in the Union for the Mediterranean.

### ***– Benchmark for language competences***

The Council took note of the Austrian delegation's concerns regarding the possible establishment of such a benchmark not only because of costs but also for reasons related to the methodology used for data collection.

The Presidency recalled that discussions on this issue are still at a preliminary stage and that it will be examined in detail before the May Council.

## **OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

### **ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Heat pumps**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision amending decision 2007/742/EC on electrically driven, gas driven or gas adsorption heat pumps ([5426/14](#)).

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

#### **EU Ecolabel for bed mattresses**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the EU Ecolabel for bed mattresses ([5282/14](#), [5282/14 ADD 1](#)).

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

#### **EU Ecolabel for converted paper products**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the EU Ecolable for converted paper products ([5302/14](#), [5302/14 ADD 1](#)).

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

### **EU Ecolabel for water-based heaters**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision establishing the criteria for the award of the EU Ecolabel for water-based heaters ([5303/14](#), [5303/14 ADD 1](#)).

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

### **EU Ecolabel for indoor and outdoor paints and varnishes**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the EU Ecolabel for indoor and outdoor paints and varnishes ([5362/14](#), [5362/14 ADD 1](#)).

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

### **Classification of substances**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision amending decisions 2011/263/EU, 2011/264/EU, 2011/382/EU, 2011/383/EU, 2012/720/EU and 2012/721/EU in order to take account of developments in the classification of substances ([5493/14](#), [5493/14 ADD 1](#)).

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

## **Greenhouse gas emission allowances to be auctioned in 2013-2020**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending Regulation No 1031/2010 in particular to determine the volumes of greenhouse gas emission allowances to be auctioned in 2013-2020 ("back-loading") ([5305/14](#), [5832/14](#)).

The measure will enable the Commission to delay the auctioning of 900 million allowances in the third trading period of the EU's emissions trading system (EU ETS) to address the surplus of emission allowances that has built up in the EU ETS, mainly as a result of the economic crisis.

The Commission regulation is subject to the so-called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has not objected and the European Parliament decided not to oppose it on 6 February 2014, the Commission may adopt the regulation.

The Commission regulation follows the adoption by the Council on 16 December 2013 of a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending the EU ETS directive. See press release [17845/13](#).

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Requirements for air transport operations**

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of a regulation amending Commission regulation 965/2012 laying down technical requirements and administrative procedures for air operations, with a view to ensuring safe operation of aircraft ([17638/13](#) + [17638/13 ADD1](#)).

While regulation 965/2012 - which implements the provisions on air operations and oversight of regulation 216/2008 on common rules in the field of civil aviation - includes requirements to be followed by operators conducting commercial air transport operations with aeroplanes and helicopters, the draft amending regulation incorporates, among other things, rules for commercial air transport operations with balloons and sailplanes. It also addresses the specificities of certain commercial operations with aeroplanes and helicopters starting and ending at the same site.

The draft legal act is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. Now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

## **FOOD LAW**

### **Methods of sampling, performance criteria and screening methods**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending regulation (EC) 401/2006 as regards methods of sampling of large lots, spices and food supplements, performance criteria for T-2, HT-2 toxin and citrinin and screening methods of analysis ([6177/14](#)).

The Commission regulation is subject to the so called 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.

## **TRADE POLICY**

### **Anti-dumping and anti-subsidies measures - South Africa - India**

The Council adopted a regulation imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain manganese dioxides originating in South Africa following an expiry review pursuant to regulation 1225/2009 ([6198/14](#)).

It also amended regulation 461/2013 imposing a definitive countervailing duty on imports of certain polyethylene terephthalate (PET) originating in India following an expiry review pursuant to regulation 597/2009 ([6195/14](#)).

## **APPOINTMENTS**

### **Court of Auditors**

The Council appointed Mr Klaus-Heiner LEHNE (Germany) as member of the Court of Auditors for a period of six years from 1 March 2014 to 29 February 2020 ([5728/14](#)).

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