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Subject: "ET2020" mid-term stocktaking and preparation of the 2015 Joint Report
- *Policy debate*
[Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency]]

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 18 May 2015.

"ET2020" mid-term stocktaking and preparation of the 2015 Joint Report

Presidency discussion paper

Policy context

“Education and Training 2020” (ET 2020), the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, is guided by four strategic objectives:

- (i) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality,
- (ii) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training,
- (iii) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, and
- (iv) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Priority areas are identified for each periodic work cycle, which are the focus of cooperation using working methods such as mutual learning in the context of the "ET 2020 Working Groups".

In 2015, a mid-term stocktaking process of ET 2020 was held, which included the preparation of national reports, an external evaluation, the annual Education, Training and Youth Forum, discussions at the High Level Group for Education and Training and Directors General meetings, as well as consultations with European social partners.

The next Joint Report of the Council and the Commission is scheduled for adoption in 2015, incorporating all education levels. The preparation of this particular Joint Report will not be a routine exercise, as it will have a strong future perspective.

In February 2014, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council invited the Member States and the Commission to increase the added value and optimise the effectiveness of the ET 2020 strategic framework and its underlying governance and working arrangements, using the mid-term stocktaking exercise to help prepare the next draft Joint Report, "*with a more forward-looking focus which identifies key priority areas and concrete issues for future work*".

It is important to increase the effectiveness of ET 2020, considering that it is the key European-level framework that helps the Member States to modernise their education and training systems, thus contributing to the overall political priorities set under the EU's jobs, growth and investment strategy, *Europe 2020* with its two-fold headline target on education - reducing early school leaving rates below 10% and ensuring that at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds have completed tertiary or equivalent education.

The ET 2020 framework also has an important role in dealing with education and training-related issues within the European Semester, in the context of the Country Specific Recommendations. The "ET 2020 Working Groups", peer reviews and other mutual learning activities provide a wide platform for discussions and the exchange of good practice, helping to tackle the challenges identified within the European Semester.

In light of the policy context and with the aim to give strong input to the preparation of the draft Joint Report 2015 as well as facilitate future negotiations in order to adopt the Joint Report 2015 in November 2015, the presidency would like to suggest the following discussion points:

1. Education and Training 2020: its value, strategic objectives and priority areas

The ET 2020 mid-term stocktaking process highlighted the value of ET 2020 as an integrated framework, covering all levels and types of education and training, as well as cross-sectoral issues. This makes it possible to ensure coherence both vertically and horizontally – between different sectors of education and training, and between different policy sectors (for example, education, employment, economy, etc.). It also improves the link between policy and financial instruments, providing more efficient use of resources such as the Erasmus+ programme, including the key element of mobility, and the EU structural and investment funds.

The complementary format between ET 2020 and the *Europe 2020* strategy has helped to better integrate policy challenges, evidence and expertise, promoting a holistic approach to education and stressing some of the topical issues including promotion of personal fulfilment and development, challenges and response to labour market needs, employability of graduates or digital progress.

In general, stakeholders expressed the view that ET 2020's existing strategic objectives continued to be valid, including for the next work cycle. The current priority areas, however, while covering many significant issues, were considered to be very broad. There was therefore a request to make them more operational, focused on concrete issues and better working methods.

In the light of this, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions regarding the strategic nature of the ET 2020 framework:

- *Do Ministers agree that the existing strategic objectives of ET 2020 remain valid, whilst also bearing in mind the emergence of new challenges? Should the operational nature of priority areas be improved? How could the added value of ET 2020 and its impact on national education and training policies be enhanced?*

2. Education and Training 2020: governance and work cycles

In view of the calls for improved governance of ET 2020 expressed during the mid-term stocktaking process, a proposal has been made to examine the possibility of extending the ET 2020 working cycle from three to five years, with the aim of achieving better synchronisation between ET 2020 and the EU's overall strategy for jobs and growth.

This would also enable the reporting burden to be reduced, by preparing National Reports and Joint Report every five years instead of every three years. The annual rhythm of the ET 2020 process, particularly through the yearly monitoring of progress in the Education and Training Monitor, would nevertheless ensure continuous development and a degree of flexibility in the face of emerging challenges.

With this in mind, Ministers are invited to reflect on the possibility of changing the work cycle of ET 2020:

- *Would Ministers support the extension of ET 2020 work cycle to medium term approach with the aim of strengthening ET 2020 within the overall EU's jobs and growth agenda? Which would be the most suitable tools to enable a flexible sectorial response to new policy challenges?*

3. Education and Training 2020 as part of the overall EU agenda for jobs, growth and investment

In February 2014, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council highlighted that education and training have a strategic role to play in supporting the economic recovery in Europe and that the EU and Member States should continue to invest in efficient, high quality education and training. It also agreed to focus on facilitating as far as possible long-term investment in the modernisation of education and training and the development of skills at both national and European level, while placing greater emphasis on the efficiency and quality of educational investment. In addition, Member States and the Commission were invited to strengthen the contribution of education and training to the EU agenda for jobs and growth by making more efficient and effective use of investments in order to raise skills levels, improve learning outcomes and address skills shortages.

During the discussions on the economic case for education held at the back-to-back Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council and the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council in December 2014, cooperation and closer synergy between the education and training sector and the employment policy sector were highlighted, acknowledging the role of quality education in promoting employability and competitiveness.

The importance of this closer cooperation was subsequently confirmed in the EPSCO conclusions of 9 March 2015 on the 2015 Annual Growth Survey and the Joint Employment Report, which called on EMCO "*to cooperate with the Education parts of the Council and explore ways of improving and better structuring this relationship, with emphasis on building a basis for evidence based debate on human capital issues*". In the light of the forthcoming review of the *Europe 2020* strategy, it is important to make use of education and training to fuel job creation and sustained economic growth.

The Investment Plan for Europe, presented by the Commission in November 2014 and endorsed by the Council in December, emphasises the need to swiftly increase the volume of investments in key policy areas, including education and training, by catalysing private capital towards strategic projects.

To ensure that adequate investment in education and training is made, to improve their effectiveness and to ensure that structural reforms are introduced where needed requires better evidence-based policy of what works, while at the same time taking into account the needs of the labour market and economic development. ET 2020 can constitute the vehicle to support Member States in developing, improving and modernising their education and training systems. It can contribute to delivering the evidence and expertise needed to improve educational outcomes.

Against this background, Ministers are invited to reflect on the possible actions in order to fully use the potential of education and training to contribute to jobs, growth and investment:

- *What actions should be taken at national and European level in the ET 2020 context to ensure that education and training are more effective in delivering high-quality educational outcomes and to increase their capacity to boost jobs, growth, investment and social cohesion?*