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Education issues

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- 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.

ITEMS DEBATED

Socio-economic development and inclusiveness through education

The Council adopted a resolution on promoting **socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education** ([5685/1/16 REV 1](#)). The text calls for targeted reforms and prioritised investment in education systems and for education to work more closely with the employment sector to address skills gaps and anticipate future skills requirements as a contribution to restoring jobs and achieving sustainable economic growth in Europe.

At the same time, it highlights the equally important role education has to play in meeting the many socio-economic challenges facing Europe today, as also acknowledged by the 2016 Annual Growth Survey (AGS).

The resolution, represents the contribution of the education and training sector to the 2016 European Semester and seeks therefore to respond not only to the messages in the AGS but also to the findings of the latest edition of the Education and Training Monitor, which made it clear that the overall performance of the EU's education and training systems needs to be significantly improved.

(http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf)

The Presidency called for further steps at **European Council** level to ensure effective follow-up to the resolution.

Commissioner Navracsics agreed that EU education and training systems must deliver better results and make efficient use of the resources available. They should be able not only to adapt to rapidly changing labour market needs, but also to offer a skills basis which can respond to the evolution of society.

Not only is education crucial for enhancing employability but also because it is one of the best means of preventing social exclusion.

He underlined the importance of attracting private capital and called on member states to present projects to be financed under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).

Connecting education, the labour market and society - Towards a new skills agenda for Europe

Following on from the previous item, education ministers discussed how to increase synergies between **education, the labour market and society**. The outcome of the ministerial debate will provide input to the Commission's initiative 'A New Skills Agenda for Europe' expected for May.

Commissioner Thyssen noted the current worrying skills gap and skills mismatches in Europe and underlined the importance of upgrading the numeracy, literacy and digital skills of all citizens. Increasing lifelong training is also crucial and requires more businesses involvement. Cross-sectoral policies are necessary to ensure greater effectiveness.

Commissioner Navracsics pointed out that not only cognitive skills are relevant in society; but that "transversal" skills such as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, languages and communication are also increasingly important for economic and social development.

He underlined that, nowadays, the lack of digital skills increases the risk of exclusion and that such skills should be acquired as early as primary school, particularly in the case of disadvantaged children.

The Commissioner also argued for entrepreneurship teaching to play a more prominent role in education and training systems and for higher education curricula to be better adapted to labour market needs. He said that the modernisation of higher education would be one of the main components of the future Skills Agenda.

The guest speaker, Mr Torbjørn Røe ISAKSEN, outlined the main features of the national skills strategy that Norway is developing in collaboration with the OCDE:

- There is no contradiction between skills for work and skills for life: both are needed
- The pace and unpredictability of changes make it difficult to foresee accurately the kind of skills required in tomorrow's workplace
- Education should not be limited to certain age groups, but available throughout life
- Skills strategies should be targeted to helping people individually
- Programmes to teach basic skills to adults population are being set-up
- Lifelong training at the workplace should become the general practice
- Methods for validation of formal and non-formal competences must be prepared

- Tailor-made measures and flexibility are needed , particularly in the case of refugees
- Improved coordination is required at all levels (national, regional and local) also involving representatives of workers and employers

In general ministers agreed with the main ideas presented by the speaker and also underlined the following points:

- Core academic skills, including literacy and numeracy, were essential, but transversal skills were an important complement
- Processes for validating formal and non-formal learning should be further developed
- The attractiveness of vocational training must be increased, and partnerships in this sector developed
- Opportunities for learning throughout life should be encouraged
- Better use should be made of transparency instruments in the education field, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Europass
- There is an increasing need for a cross-sectoral approach

The Commission underlined that member states should make the best use of existing EU programmes and tools such as the European Social Fund and Erasmus +.

The Presidency said that a similar policy debate is planned for the EPSCO Council of 7 March, where employment ministers will address skills-related issues from a labour market perspective. With this in mind, the Presidency will send a letter to the President of the EPSCO Council summarising the conclusions of today's debate.

After the EPSCO Council, both ministers will send a letter to the Commission presenting the key conclusions from both Councils meetings.

Promoting citizenship and fundamental values through education

Ministers had an exchange of views on measures to promote citizenship and fundamental values through education ([5545/16](#)), as part of the follow-up to the [Paris Declaration](#) adopted in March 2015, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen early last year. The declaration called for further efforts to strengthen the key contribution education can make towards personal development, social inclusion and participation, by imparting the fundamental values and principles on which our democratic societies are founded.

The aim of the ministerial exchange of views was to ensure that the declaration remains a dynamic and living document and to prepare the ground for possible future steps.

The ministers from three member states (France, Czech Republic and Spain) each briefly outlined a concrete example of a policy or project in their country related to a specific aspect of the Declaration.

France addressed the issue of media literacy.

Our societies are information-overloaded societies. This abundance of information can have positive effects, such as developing openness and discovery, but it also brings risks: passive consumption, saturation and dispersion, misunderstanding and manipulation. That is why media literacy is a major social issue.

France has established a focal institution as a link between media and the education sector. Its missions are to train teachers, reinforce critical thinking and support school media (including newspapers, radio stations, blogs, websites, etc.).

The Czech Republic talked about citizenship education.

The development of civic values through education is a necessary precondition for the existence of a free and democratic state. Each new generation must maintain its determination to safeguard freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Nowadays we understand citizenship education primarily as a tool that enables children and young people to participate actively in society, as well as in political decision-making processes, and reinforce social cohesion. For instance, the Czech Republic has developed a Children's and Youth's parliaments which have regular contacts with public institutions.

Spain developed the issue of teachers empowerment.

European education systems face the challenge of educating pupils as European citizens who embrace the values inherent to Western democracies and who are capable of contributing to the building and development of European cultural, economic and political systems.

Achieving this require significant changes in teaching methods and strong pedagogical leadership in schools. One of the main challenges this new model faces is providing school management teams and teachers with the specific training they need.

Following the three presentations, a number of ministers also gave brief presentations of measures already in place or planned in their countries as part of the follow-up to the commitments under the Paris Declaration.

The Commission announced that it had allocated €400 million until 2020 under Erasmus+ for projects promoting civic values. Later this year it will also launch a specific call for proposals in this field with a budget of €13 million and has set up a dedicated ET2020 working group, to develop concrete measures for combatting radicalisation.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EMPLOYMENT

Platform to tackle undeclared work

The Council adopted a decision establishing a platform to tackle undeclared work.

The platform is intended to encourage closer cooperation between the relevant authorities in the member states responsible for tackling undeclared work. The overall aim is to help improve working conditions, promote integration into the labour market and social inclusion. [See also](#)

ENERGY

Memorandum of Understanding EU-BERD

The Council approved the EU political position as established in the text of the Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (BERD) to reinforce cooperation in the field of energy, strengthening climate action ([5928/16](#)).

The Council also authorised the Commission to sign the Memorandum on behalf of the European Union. The signature is scheduled for the first quarter of 2016.

The EU and the BERD share common objectives in the field of energy and climate, such as pursuing a transition to a low-carbon economy and increasing energy security inside the Union, in the neighbouring countries and in other developing countries and emerging economies where their activities overlap.

The areas of common interest include the scaling-up of energy efficiency investments, wider deployment of renewable energy and the strengthening of energy security.

Court of Auditors report on security of energy supply

The Council adopted conclusions ([6026/16](#)) on the [Special Report](#) from the European Court of Auditors entitled 'Improving the security of energy supply by developing the internal energy market: more efforts needed'.

The Court's recommendations focus on the completion of the internal energy market and the implementation and enforcement of the EU regulatory framework, in particular the third energy package.

Security of energy supply is one of the five dimensions of the Commission's strategy "A [Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy](#)" which was presented in 2015.

ENVIRONMENT

End-of-life vehicles directive

The Council has decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission directive ([5120/16](#) + [ADD1](#)) concerning end-of-life vehicles. This act amends annex II to directive [2000/53/EC](#).

The draft Commission directive updates the list of materials and components exempted from the prohibition on the use of lead. This list is included in annex II of directive [2000/53/EC](#). The update takes into account whether these specific uses have become avoidable or not, based on the assessment of technical and scientific progress.

Directive [2000/53/EC](#) is aimed at making the dismantling and recycling of end-of-life vehicles more environmentally friendly - for instance, by ensuring that new vehicles are not manufactured using hazardous substances.

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

BUDGETS

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Belgium

The Council adopted a decision mobilising €1.1 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), providing support for 412 dismissed workers of two Belgian companies producing certain non-metallic mineral products. The redundancies are due to the continuing structural changes in world trade patterns in the wake of globalisation.

The EGF helps workers to find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved outside the EU, or as a result of the global financial and economic crisis. The help of the EGF consists in co-financing measures such as job-search assistance, careers advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promoting entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.
