**Council of the
European Union**

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
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Subject:	Taking forward the education aspects of the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 *- Policy debate* *(Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure)* *[proposed by the Presidency]*

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached

discussion paper, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 15 February 2018.

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Taking forward the education aspects of the European Council conclusions of

14 December 2017

Presidency discussion paper

In the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 under the chapter on the social dimension, education and culture (in Annex), European leaders expressed their determination and political will to advance the education agenda in Europe, whilst highlighting that *'under the Treaties, Member States remain primarily responsible for these areas*, *but much can be achieved by working together, while fully respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality'*.

The conclusions called for work to be taken forward on a number of specific initiatives, and also asked the Commission, the Council and Member States to look at other possible measures addressing some of the key challenges facing the education sector.

Leaders will convene in May 2019 in Sibiu to draw conclusions from the debate on the future of Europe and the Leaders' Agenda expresses a clear interest in addressing education in this context.

There is a broad consensus that education plays a key role for Europe and its citizens in developing a European knowledge economy and building inclusive, skilled and cohesive societies based on common values and resilience and equipped with the skills for successful personal and professional development. The following should be reflected:

–   In the wake of the Commission's white paper of 1 March 2017, leaders of 27 Member States and of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission committed to the **Rome Agenda** on 25 March 2017. In this document they pledge to work towards, among other things, *'a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent'*.

–   In the context of the Social Summit in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission solemnly proclaimed the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which sets out, as its first principle, that *everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'.*

–   Also at the Social Summit, the **first discussion under the new Leaders' Agenda** was devoted to education and culture, and it established political support for a number of specific work strands, on the basis of the Leaders' Agenda background note on education and culture and the Commission communication *'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture'.*

–   The **European Council conclusions** of 14 December 2017 reflected the outcome of the discussion on education and culture at the Social Summit and highlighted *'the importance of the social, educational and cultural dimension of our policies in bringing Europeans together and building our common future'.*

In the efforts to achieve the ambitious goals set out in the European Council conclusions, full use should be made of all relevant instruments. Exchange of good practice and learning from one another, in particular through the framework for cooperation in education and training, are important instruments to support national policy making. The policies undertaken at national level which help to deliver on the European Semester should be fully acknowledged.

As mentioned in the European Council conclusions, the issue of budgetary resources for education activities will need to be addressed in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) have been funding comprehensive reforms in the Member States and have played a major role in ensuring access to education and training for disadvantaged groups.

The rich cultural diversity in Europe is reflected by our education and training systems – a strength that needs to be nurtured in a holistic manner. Education and training is also a key driver for innovation, competitiveness and resilience in the global economy in times of rapid technological progress.

Although the Union's competences in education as set out in Article 165 of the Treaty on European Union do not allow for the harmonisation seen in other fields, *'the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States'*. The European Commission, in its communication 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture', set out its position on the way forward *'towards a European Education Area based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth, to be established by 2025'*.

In this context the Commission, on 17 January 2018, adopted three new initiatives: a proposal for a Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, a Communication on the digital education action plan, and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.

Strengthening learning mobility and optimising cooperation of Member States on diploma recognition

The Erasmus+ programme is eminently successful in actively promoting learning mobility within and beyond the EU and its impact could be maximised with the aim of doubling the number of participants. Strengthening mobility within VET and study areas such as STE(A)M, robotics, climate change and artificial intelligence could help Europe be a leader in those key areas. Wider usage of a European Student Card has the potential to facilitate the mobility of pupils and students. Mobility is also key for swift and effective language acquisition. 'European Universities' have the potential to take international cooperation between universities of different Member States to a much more ambitious level. A 'European Education Area' could play a key role in promoting cooperation of Member States on mutual recognition of school leaving diplomas (or similar qualifications) at secondary education level and facilitating the cross-border validation of training and life-long learning certificates.

Maximising the quality and inclusiveness of education

The quality of education and training outcomes must be constantly emphasised and the inclusive nature of education and training must be strongly enhanced. The latest PISA results indicate a deteriorating trend in achievements in science and stagnation in mathematics, while the share of pupils with excellent results is low by international standards. At the same time, results show that the risk of becoming a low achiever is four times higher for pupils from a weak socio-economic background. Early childhood education, as well as life-long learning, is vital for forming active societies built on the basis of European identity and common values.

Implementing an ambitious action plan for digital education

The digital transformation accelerates with the rapid advance of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and blockchain. Digitisation affects how we live, study and work. While some jobs will disappear, others will be replaced, industries will be transformed and new activities will emerge. Education and training systems should make best use of the digital opportunities and empower our societies. Education is the backbone of growth and inclusion in the EU and a key task is to prepare citizens to make the most of the opportunities and meet the challenges of a fast-moving, globalised and interconnected world. More than ever, we need an ambitious digital education action plan for Europe to address these issues.

Questions:

1. How should the work be taken forward to deliver on the specific initiatives (such as "European Universities", learning of languages, mutual recognition of diplomas and a "European Student Card") mentioned in the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017?

2. What measures should be identified and developed as priorities to address digitalisation and the need for an inclusive, lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training?

Extract from the Conclusions of the European Council of 14 December 2017, Doc. EUCO 19/17

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education and culture are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness. In Gothenburg we expressed a willingness to do more in these areas, in which the EU plays an important supplementing and supporting role. As a result, the European Council calls on Member States, the Council and the Commission, in line with their respective competences, to take work forward with a view to:

- stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ programme;
- strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities;
- enhancing the learning of languages, so that more young people will speak at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue;
- promoting student mobility and participation in educational and cultural activities, including through a 'European Student Card';
- promoting cooperation of Member States on mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas at secondary education level in the appropriate framework;
- taking the opportunity of the European Year of Cultural Heritage to increase awareness of the social and economic importance of culture and cultural heritage.

The Commission is invited to present, where relevant, proposals for Council recommendations in spring 2018 with a view to adoption by the Council as soon as possible.

The European Council also asks the Commission, the Council and the Member States to examine possible measures addressing:

- the skills challenges linked to digitalisation, cybersecurity, media literacy and artificial intelligence;
- the need for an inclusive, lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training;
- the legal and financial framework conditions for the development of cultural and creative industries and the mobility of professionals of the cultural sector.

The issue of budgetary resources for the above activities will be addressed in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

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