

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LXI COSAC

SESSION III

The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

–background note–

According to the current Treaties, Member States retain the competence for education, vocational training and culture, but the EU plays an important complementary role, by encouraging cooperation between Member States, while supporting and supplementing their action.

The EU is particularly concerned with (i) developing the European dimension in education, (ii) encouraging mobility of students, trainees and teachers, (iii) promoting cooperation between educational establishments and (iv) improving initial and continuous vocational training and facilitating access to it, in order to enable vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market. As such, the EU institutions may adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States ([Articles 165 and 166 TFEU](#)).

Improving the quality and the number of jobs has been a top priority of the current European Commission. In this regard, several initiatives were put forward: the [Youth Guarantee](#), the [Youth Employment Initiative](#), the [Recommendation](#) on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market and the [Skills Agenda for Europe](#).

Under the Youth Guarantee, Member States [committed](#) to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good

quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship, within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Latest data indicate that this initiative has been a success story, since more than 14 million young people have benefitted from it since 2014.

In June 2016, the new [Skills Agenda for Europe](#) aimed at increasing human capital, employability and competitiveness, with a focus on (i) improving the quality and relevance of skills formation, (ii) making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and (iii) improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices. A key initiative was the creation of the “[Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition](#)”, in order to tackle the need for digital skills at all levels: digital society, digital economy, digital industry and education. The Coalition established four goals to be achieved by 2020:

- train 1 million young unemployed people for vacant digital jobs;
- support the upskilling and retraining of the workforce;
- modernise education and training; and
- reorient and make use of available funding to support digital skills.

At the [Social Summit held in Gothenburg](#) in 2017, president J.-C. Juncker seized the

opportunity to present education and culture as key topics to building inclusive and cohesive societies, “drivers for job creation, economic growth, social fairness and ultimately unity”. On this occasion, the European Commission presented its contribution on [Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture](#), inviting Member States, in full respect of subsidiarity, to work together with the EU for the establishment of the European Education Area by 2025.

The European Education Area should include:

- (i) learning mobility;
- (ii) removing obstacles to the recognition of qualifications;
- (iii) modernising the development of curricula;
- (iv) boosting language learning;
- (v) creating world-class European universities that can work seamlessly together across borders;
- (vi) improving education, training and lifelong learning;
- (vii) driving innovation in education throughout the digital era;
- (viii) giving more support to teachers;
- (ix) investing in education by using the European Semester to support structural reforms and to improve the education policy, by using EU funding and EU investment instruments to finance education and by setting a benchmark for Member States to invest 5% of GDP in education; and
- (x) preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of a European identity and culture.

The [European Council Conclusions](#), of December 2017, called on Member States, the Council and the European Commission to:

- a) strengthen and extend Erasmus+ programme, in order to support learning of languages; and
- b) encourage Member States' cooperation on mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas, in order to facilitate student mobility and partnerships between higher education institutions.

Other issues that needed to be tackled were also underlined: (i) skills challenges linked to digitalization, (ii) lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven approach to education and training and (iii) development of cultural and creative industries.

In January 2018, the European Commission presented three initiatives to improve key competences and digital skills, as well as the European dimension of education: a [Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning](#); a [Digital education action plan](#); a Digital education action plan and a [Council Recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching](#). These initiatives were followed, in May 2018, by a second package, representing a response to the invitations made by the European Council, in December 2017. It contains:

- i. a set of proposals for a [stronger role for policies on youth, education and culture](#) to help secure a more competitive, inclusive and cohesive Europe;
- ii. a youth strategy for the 2019-2027 period;
- iii. a new European agenda for culture, as well as
- iv. Council recommendations on mutual recognition of diplomas, on teaching and learning of languages and on high quality early childhood education and care systems.

A [study](#) requested by the European Parliament's CULT Committee (August 2018)

analysed priorities of the Digital education action plan, stating that there were different dependency levels of education and training institutions on the labour market. According to this analysis, when such dependency is strong, national policy-makers should offer more support, but the European Commission's Communication "lacks a more strategic view" on this matter. On another hand, acknowledging the complexity of education governance arrangements, the CULT Committee saw the benefits of exchanging common data, storage standards and templates for digitally-certified qualifications. It also suggested that education institutions should be financially supported to pass from paper-based to digitally certified qualifications.

Also, the European Commission has been invited to develop a clear roadmap on facilitating female participation in ICT and STEM careers.

In November 2018, the EU Council adopted a [resolution](#) concerning the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, inviting Member States to encourage democratic participation of all young people to society and to the democratic processes. Furthermore, the Council drew the attention to cross-border mobility opportunities for young people and youth workers, to effective systems for validation and recognition of skills and competencies, as well as to developing and implementing a European Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.

The [European Parliament resolution](#) on education in the digital era, of 11 December 2018, linked the acquisition of digital skills to the lifelong learning approach, stating that education and training systems needed to provide opportunities to upskill and re-skill across all age groups. However, the European Parliament stated that the educational and

training systems' transformation should not be done at the expense of traditional and humanistic skills, and that a particular attention should be paid to minors' protection against risks associated with the use of the Internet and ICT tools. In addition, Member States were called to invest more in order to (i) provide all schools with high-capacity broadband, (ii) promote and finance regional and local initiatives that support innovation, (iii) develop digital literacy programmes in Europe's minority and regional languages, (iv) identify existing skill gaps, (v) expand digital and Internet literacy and (vi) establish a high level of digital connectivity and inclusion.

As to the European Education Area and in the full respect of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, on 22 May 2019 the [Council](#) (Education, Youth, Culture and Sports) adopted two recommendations on [teaching and learning of languages](#) and [high quality early childhood education and care systems](#). The aims were to help all young people to acquire competences in two other languages than their mother tongues and to support Member States in their efforts to improve accessibility and quality of their early childhood education and care systems. Also, the Council adopted [conclusions](#) on young people and the future of work, with a focus on: adaptable and responsive education and training systems; promotion of lifelong learning; smooth school-to-work and work-to-work transitions and equal access to quality jobs for all young people in the future.

Issues for discussion:

- *Who should manage the changes of the labour market following the digital revolution and the technological progress? (National level / shared responsibilities?)*

- *What would be the role of the national Parliaments in the future labour market?*
- *Are national Parliaments willing to support a common European framework in the area of education and training?*