



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



17640/11

PROVISIONAL VERSION

PRESSE 454

PR CO 72

Items taken on 28.11.11 only

PRESS RELEASE

3128th Council meeting

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

Brussels, 28 November 2011

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Main results of the Council

EDUCATION

*The Council adopted a **resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning**.*

The Council also adopted conclusions on

- **language competences to enhance mobility;***
- **the modernisation of higher education;***
- **a benchmark for learning mobility.***

*In public, ministers held a policy debate on **investing effectively in education and training in a time of crisis***

The Council also adopted without debate four legislative acts:

- **a regulation amending regulation 1934/2006 establishing a financing instrument for cooperation with industrialised and other high-income countries and territories;***
- **a regulation amending regulation 1905/2006 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation;***
- **a regulation amending regulation 1889/2006 on establishing a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide;***
- **a regulation amending regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation.***

YOUTH

*Ministers had a public debate concerning **youth cooperation beyond the EU**. The Council also adopted conclusions on the **Eastern dimension of youth participation and mobility**.*

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PARTICIPANTS

The governments of the member states and the European Commission were represented as follows:

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Mme Marie-Dominique SIMONET

Mme Joke SCHAUVLIEGE

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Minister for Compulsory Education and Social Advancement

Flemish Minister for the Environment, Nature and Culture

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Mr Mitko TODOROV

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Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Science

Deputy Minister for Culture

Deputy Minister for Physical Education and Sports

Czech Republic:

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Mr Jakub DÜRR

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Deputy Permanent Representative

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Minister for Culture

Minister for Children and Education

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Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Education and Research

Minister of State, Federal Chancellery

Deputy Permanent Representative

Estonia:

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Minister for Culture

Deputy Permanent Representative

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Deputy Permanent Representative

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Mr Philippe LEGLISE-COSTA

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Ministry of Culture temporarily under the authority of the Minister responsible for Slovenians Abroad
Deputy Permanent Representative

Mr Uroš VAJGL

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Mr Peter HONETH

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Deputy Permanent Representative

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Deputy Permanent Representative

Commission:

Ms Neelie KROES
Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

Vice-President
Member

ITEMS DEBATED

EDUCATION

Language competences

The Council adopted conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility ([16744/11](#)) which are aimed primarily at re-emphasising that language learning is a key factor in promoting economic growth and competitiveness, as well as in enhancing mobility and employability.

The Polish Presidency reiterated that language learning is one of its key priorities in the field of education and training: in addition to the social and cultural benefits it brings, multilingual citizens are thus better placed to take advantage of the many educational, professional and economic opportunities created by an integrated Europe.

Commissioner Vassiliou informed the Council that the Commission launched a study on language skills, involving 14 member states, which will be published in the course of 2012. She also recalled that one of the main priorities of the new programme "Erasmus for all" was also language learning and multilingualism.

Modernisation of higher education

The Council adopted conclusions on this subject ([16746/11](#)), primarily in response to a Commission communication of last September ([14198/11](#) + [ADD 1](#)), which stressed the need for reforms in higher education, in order to maximise the sector's potential, as well as its contribution to ensuring economic recovery and sustainable growth.

The conclusions also acknowledge that higher education - through its links with research and innovation - plays a crucial role in achieving the Europe 2020 strategy goals, which set an ambitious target specifically in this field, namely that "by 2020 the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education should be at least 40 %".

Europe currently has around 4 000 higher education institutions, with over 19 million students and 1.5 million staff but only 26 % of the EU workforce currently hold tertiary level qualifications. It should be noted that the unemployment rate of people having tertiary level qualifications is almost half of the rate of those who don't have them.

Agenda for adult learning

The Council adopted a resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning ([16743/11](#)), which aims to bring fresh impetus to this important area of education and sets out a long-term vision in this field up to 2020, establishing also a number of short-term priorities to be achieved by 2014, such as:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning;
- Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments;
- Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring this sector.

Adult learning still lacks the recognition and resources afforded to other areas of education but it is generally acknowledged that it has an important role to play in terms of employability and mobility, as well as in enhancing social inclusion and personal development, in particular since Europe is confronted with the triple challenge of an ageing working population, accelerating technological change and an increasingly competitive global economy.

In order to achieve the ambitious target that member states have set themselves of ensuring that 15 % of the working age population participate in some form of adult learning by the year 2020, it is necessary to devote special attention to measures providing continued skills development and further education for the high number of low-skilled Europeans ¹. A first step would consist in improving literacy, numeracy and digital skills and enhancing second-chance measures.

Benchmark for learning mobility

The Council adopted conclusions on developing a benchmark for learning mobility ([16745/11](#)), to complement the five existing reference levels of European average performance ("benchmarks"), agreed under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") and to be collectively achieved by 2020, namely that:

- at least 95 % of children should participate in early childhood education;
- the share of 15-year-olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 %;
- the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 %;
- the share of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40 %;
- an average of at least 15 % of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong learning.

¹ In 2010, the average rate of adult participation in lifelong learning stood at 9.1 % - down from 9.8 % in 2005.

Investing in education and training in a time of crisis

In the context of significant reductions in public spending across the EU, ministers discussed, in public deliberation, relevant issues such as the implications of the financial crisis for member states' education and training systems, what constitutes "effective investment" and which areas should be given priority at a time of limited resources.

The debate was preceded by a short presentation of a study developed by European Expert Network on Economics of Education (www.eenee.org) on the cost to society of low educational achievement by Professor Ludger Wössmann, of the University of Munich's Institute for Economic Research.

Most member states acknowledged the crucial importance of investing in education in order to foster growth and employment at medium term. A number of them didn't cut their education expenditure in spite of current difficult economic situation, and some member states even increased it in certain sectors.

Several ministers also underlined in this context that successful investment in education and training don't depend so much on the amounts spent but primarily on its quality. They also argued in favour of a more results-based allocation of resources and a more efficient use of European structural funds. However, a significant number of ministers agreed that new and sustainable forms of funding must be found in particular for higher education and that the collaboration with the business sector and other private institutions should be strengthened.

Some member states considered that pre-school and tertiary education should be a priority for investments since this can result in successfully reducing early school leaving and unemployment, particularly in the case of disadvantaged children.

Several ministers also highlighted the crucial role of vocational training to foster inclusion and employment. Formal and non-formal education should therefore be valued and recognized.

The key role of teachers was also stressed by several member states, requiring that particular attention should be devoted to their training and motivation in order to ensure high quality teaching.

Any other business

– ***"Erasmus for All"***

The Council took note of information presented by Commissioner Vassiliou on the proposal for a regulation establishing "Erasmus for All": the new EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport ([17188/11](#)).

The programme aims at supporting all education sectors (namely higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning, schools education and youth), in a lifelong learning perspective. The "Erasmus for all" programme focuses on three types of key actions, namely the transnational and international learning mobility of students, young people, teachers and staff; cooperation for innovation and good practices between education institutions, as well as support to capacity building in third countries.

Within the context of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), one of the priorities of "Erasmus for all" is to emphasise streamlining, simplification and a performance-based allocation of funds. The European added value of the programme results from the innovative and transnational character of the activities undertaken and of the partnerships it helps to develop across Europe.

– ***Key Presidency events in the field of education***

The Council took note of the report on key events organized by the Polish Presidency in particular the ministerial conference (Gdansk, 11 October 2011) and the ministerial debate "Go East, Erasmus" (Białystok, 28 September 2011) (<http://pl2011.eu/en>)

– ***Juvenes Translatores***

The Council took note of the information presented by the Commission concerning the translation contest *Juvenes Translatores* ([14432/11](#)), addressed to 17 year-old secondary school pupils in all EU Member States and designed to promote language learning, multilingualism and translation among young people. *Juvenes Translatores* has grown steadily in popularity and it is about to celebrate its fifth anniversary, with 700 schools all over Europe organising the contest on their respective premises on 24 November 2011.

– ***Work programme of the incoming Danish Presidency in the field of education***

The Council took note of information from the Danish delegation on the Presidency's priorities for the coming semester, in particular:

- Examination of the "Erasmus for all" proposal ;
- Benchmark for employability;
- Entrepreneurship and innovation.

YOUTH

Eastern dimension of youth participation

The Council adopted conclusions on the Eastern dimension of youth participation and mobility ([15952/11](#)), supporting cooperation and facilitating mobility for young people, youth workers and youth organisations from the European Union, particularly with the Eastern European countries (Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia), in the context of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field¹. The Eastern dimension is an important priority for the Polish Presidency.

The conclusions include several horizontal recommendations concerning mobility in the fields of culture, society, politics or personal life, which aim to indicate the most effective methods of developing cooperation and increasing the quality of mobility, in particular in the field of non-formal education and voluntary activities.

Commissioner Vassiliou indicated that a "Eastern Partnership window" was being created in the "Youth in Action" programme, which has already an allocation of 31,5 million EUR for the next two years. Furthermore, the European Youth Portal will be upgraded and more user-friendly for the neighbouring countries.

Youth and the World

In public deliberation, Ministers discussed the theme "Youth and the World", i.e. young people's cooperation with regions outside the EU.

Most member states underlined the importance of the objectives of "Youth and the World" action², namely raising young people's awareness concerning sustainable development and human rights, as well as fostering mutual understanding and solidarity among young people from all over the world .

¹ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009.

² OJ C 311, 19.12.2009.

A large number of member states already develop national initiatives to promote dialogue with countries outside the EU (Mediterranean and Balkan countries in particular, as well as Eastern Europe and Caucasus), and implement supporting actions such as training courses, workshops, youth exchanges and meetings.

Some ministers recalled in this context, that youth participation and cooperation should have an even more prominent role within the Eastern Partnership which is an initiative of strategic significance for the stability and security both of the Eastern European countries and of the EU as a whole, aiming in particular at strengthening the civil society

A large number of ministers highlighted the importance of broadening the existing EU mobility programs, the need for improving access to information and better cross-sectoral cooperation, the promotion of language learning and called for an easier access to visas for young people. The Presidency added that these needs were also repeatedly expressed by young people themselves during the structured dialogue.

Any other business

– ***"Erasmus for All"***

The Council took note of information presented by Commissioner Vassiliou on the proposal for a regulation establishing "Erasmus for All": the new EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport ([17188/11](#)), focusing more particularly on youth issues.

– ***EU Structured Dialogue with young people***

The Council took note of the report from the Presidency on the EU youth conference - the final stage of the dialogue at the European level - which took place on 5-7 September 2011, in Warsaw (<http://pl2011.eu/en>). The aim of the conference was to summarise the results of consultations with young people that took place in all member states from June to August 2011 and were attended by more than 12000 participants.

The EU youth conference involved not only young people but also representatives of public administrations and various experts in this area, as well as the European Commission and other institutions. Recommendations were developed jointly by all participants during workshops.

– ***Work programme of the incoming Danish Presidency in the youth field***

The Council took note of information from the Danish delegation on the Presidency's priorities for the coming semester, in particular:

- creativity;
- citizenship, transition to working life;
- Erasmus for all examination.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Reform of EU external financial instruments

The Council approved amendments to certain EU external financial instruments and a EUR 190 million programme to help banana producers in ACP countries (*56/11 REV 1 + 57/11 REV 1 + 58/11 REV 1 + 59/11 REV 1*). For more information, see press release [13823/11](#).

HEALTH

EU statement on world AIDS day

The Council adopted an EU statement on world AIDS day (1 December 2011), set out in *17261/11*.

INTERNAL MARKET

Chemicals - REACH system - Technical update

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of regulations updating annexes XIV and XVII to regulation 1907/2006 on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals ("REACH"¹) as regards the classification of certain substances.

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

¹ Official Journal L 136, 29.5.2007, p. 3.

Medical devices - Electronic instructions - Update to technical progress

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of a regulation addressing the supply of instructions for use of medical devices in electronic form.

Directives 90/385/EEC and 93/42/EEC concerning medical devices contain provisions on the means by which, in the light of technical progress and considering the intended users of certain medical devices, the information specified in the two directives concerning these devices may be set out.

The draft regulation is subject to the 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.

FOOD

Scrutiny of a Commission decision on food enzymes

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision amending decisions 2011/263/EU and 2011/264/EU in order to take into account of developments in enzymes classification in accordance with annex I to Council directive 67/548/EEC and annex VI to regulation 1272/2008 ([14637/11](#));

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 it, unless the European Parliament objects.
