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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3316th Council meeting

### **Education, Youth, Culture and Sport**

Brussels, 20 and 21 May 2014

Presidents **Athanasios KYRIAZIS**  
Secretary-general for Education and Religious Affairs

**Panos PANAGIOTOPOULOS**  
Minister for Culture and Audiovisual

**Panagiotis Kanellopoulos**  
General-Secretary for Youth  
of Greece

# **P R E S S**

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## **Main results of the Council**

### **Education**

*The Council adopted conclusions on:*

- *effective **teacher education**, addressing concrete issues such as how to attract and retain the best candidates, how to ensure the relevance of teacher education programmes and how to better exploit the potential of new technologies and resources. Member states are also invited to use the funding opportunities in EU instruments, such as the Erasmus+.*
- *multilingualism and the **development of language competences**, inviting member states to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching.*
- ***quality assurance** supporting education and training, which cover specific issues such as the quality of cross-border education and the extent to which quality assurance arrangements could be developed in other areas of education and training, such as schools, work-based learning and non-formal learning.*

*It also held, in public deliberation, a policy debate on the subject: "**Education crossing borders: new opportunities and challenges**". The Secretary-General for Education and Religious Affairs of the Greek government and President the Council, Professor Athanasios KYRIAZIS, declared that "the three sets of conclusions constituted the basis for a rich debate on this issue which is increasingly important in Europe. The national and international higher education institutes and studies providers should work together to ensure the quality of cross-border curricula and diplomas".*

### **Youth**

*The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states adopted two resolutions on:*

- *the **EU Work Plan for Youth**, which is a medium-term plan for 18 months, with key initiatives in specific youth policy areas, so as to enable the EU and its member states to address urgently the high youth unemployment rates and the consequences of the current crisis for young people.*
- *the **structured dialogue process**, which is a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field, involving a wide range of young people and youth organisations.*

*The Council also adopted conclusions on promoting **youth entrepreneurship to foster social inclusion**, focusing on creativity, innovation and green jobs and inviting member states to recognise the importance of entrepreneurial education from an early age, highlighting the role of non-formal and informal learning to ensure the autonomy and the personal development of young people, as well as to facilitate their successful integration into the labour market.*

*In this context, ministers also discussed, in public deliberation, how to foster **an entrepreneurial mindset among today's younger generation**. The discussion brought together experiences and proposals from member states and had the contribution of an external guest speaker, Mr Konstantinos Kollias (President of the Economic Chamber of Greece). Mr Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, General-Secretary for Youth stated that "this issue is a priority for the Greek Presidency, given the still high youth unemployment rate in Europe and in particular in Greece."*

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- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
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Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

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**ITEMS DEBATED**

**EDUCATION**

**Teacher education**

The Council adopted **conclusions on effective teacher education** ([8883/14](#)), addressing concrete issues such as how to attract and retain the best candidates, how to ensure the relevance of teacher education programmes and how to better exploit the potential of new technologies and resources. The conclusions highlight the importance of identifying the professional competences which teacher educators themselves need, as well as the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they should be helping future teachers to develop. Member states are also invited to use the funding opportunities in EU instruments, such as the Erasmus+ Programme and, where appropriate, the European Social Fund.

The education and training of teachers - both in preparation for, and throughout, their careers - is a crucial element in ensuring high quality teaching, which in turn is a key factor in achieving better learning outcomes and educational success. Although many member states provide support for teachers and school leaders, they do not always have specific policies or provisions for teacher educators, therefore the exchange of best practices between member states should be increased.

The Commission underlined the importance of this issue, in particular now that a large number of teachers are leaving the profession and quite a number of them are entering it. It also recalled that the 1<sup>st</sup> international survey on teachers (OCDE Thalys project) will be available in June.

**Language competences**

The Council adopted conclusions on **multilingualism and the development of language competences** ([9513/14](#)), which come initially in response to the work done by the Commission for a possible EU benchmark on language learning.

The conclusions invite member states to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching.



The assessment of language competences proposed in the conclusions is designed to help member states in this task, as well as to measure overall progress across the EU in developing such competences.

Linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue and being able to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue is a key competence that contributes to the mobility, employability and personal development of European citizens, in particular young people, in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs.

However, a recent European survey<sup>1</sup> showed that the level of foreign language learning in Europe is generally poor: too many pupils fail to reach even a 'basic user' level and almost half of Europeans report that they are unable to hold a conversation in any language other than their mother tongue.

The Commission recalled its preference for a true European benchmark, but was also aware of the complexity and diversity of the linguistic landscape in the EU, with many national factors influencing language policy. It also highlighted the importance of working in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

The conclusions constitute a valuable basis by defining the criteria for an EU-wide survey of language competences which the Commission proposes to organise in 2016-17 and which will be largely funded via the Erasmus+ programme.

### **Quality assurance**

The Council is due to adopt conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training ([9516/14](#)), which take stock of quality assurance initiatives already taken in the higher education and vocational education and training sectors. They also address specific issues such as the quality of cross-border education and the extent to which quality assurance arrangements could be developed in other areas of education and training, such as schools, work-based learning and non-formal learning.

Promoting quality in all sectors of the education and training system is an important priority for all member states, although ensuring quality and transparency is important not just at national level but at European level too, as more and more students participate in cross-border mobility schemes, not least those funded by the new Erasmus+ Programme.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php)

The Commission stated its willingness to support member states in this field, in particular regarding work-based learning and non-formal and informal learning. It recalled recent Commission reports in this sector<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the Commission underlined the need for quality assurance also at pre-school and school education level and for improving synergies between quality and mobility in vocational education and training.

### **Education crossing borders: new opportunities and challenges<sup>2</sup>**

In the follow-up to the adoption of the above conclusions, ministers discussed cross-border education issues on the basis of questions prepared by the Presidency ([9127/14](#)).

Although the phenomenon of cross-border education is emerging across Europe, driven by internationalisation, competition and the Internet, there are still significant differences on member states level of implication in this sector.

Member states agreed in general that the Bologna process is the blueprint for cross border education and that cooperation and the exchange of best practices at European level were crucial. Some ministers advocated the establishment of a European platform to exchange information on these issues.

However, most member states were of the view that there was no need for more European instruments in this sector but rather that the existing ones should be more efficiently used. In fact,

A number of member states have already put in place partnerships between higher education establishments at national but also at international level and several of them wished to extend this cooperation to vocational education and training.

Some member states argued that the digitalisation of the education process must be made already, independently of cross-border issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission reports: "Progress in Quality Assurance in Higher Education" ([5855/14](#)) And "Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training" ([5856/14](#))

<sup>2</sup> See also: Council conclusions on the global dimension of European higher education (OJ C 28, 31.1.2014)  
Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes ([14871/12](#))

Slovenia, with the support of several member states, requested the creation of a package of scholarships for Western Balkans students. The Commission informed that the scholarships and the mobility of Western Balkans students have already significantly increased and Erasmus + will create even more opportunities for exchanges.

Many member states strongly insisted that the opportunities created by cross-border education must be underpinned by strict quality standards and maximum transparency applying either to national or third country institutes or to study programmes providers. Cross-border education cannot become a “diploma-mill”.

Several member states pointed out that this is of course linked to diploma recognition and quality assurance systems that should be improved at European level. Some member states also recalled the importance of language proficiency to fully benefit from the advantages of education abroad.

Some member states also drew attention to the fact that the management of external campuses requires a lot of capacity and investment, which can be a risk to the mother institution.

### **Other business**

#### **– *University multirank***

The Council took note of information from the Commission regarding U-Multirank, the new global university ranking, set up with €2 million in funding from the European Union. It assesses the performance of more than 850 higher education institutions worldwide, rating universities on a much wider range of criteria than the existing international rankings which focus mainly on research outcomes.

The idea is to avoid simplistic tables which can result in misleading comparisons between institutions of very different types or mask significant differences in quality between courses at the same university. Individual users will be able to build a personalised ranking based on their particular needs.

– ***Enhancing children's media literacy***

The Council took note of a presentation by the Commission on the Film Club project, a UK based charity organisation which has been working with schools through the UK since 2007 with the aim of bringing children and young people in contact with films, in particular European films. It gives children aged between 5 and 19 the opportunity to watch, discuss and review films and it also provides them with training and online resources to make their own films.

Commissioner Vassiliou personally considers this project as an example of best practice in media literacy, since it boosts the children's' literacy, critical thinking and film-making skills.

– ***Work programme of the incoming Presidency***

The Council took note of information from the Italian delegation on the work programme of the future Presidency, which will include the following priorities:

- Stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship of SMEs
- Education and training in the review of Europe 2020
- Well being at school
- Prevention of school drop-out
- Promotion of multilingualism

## **YOUTH**

### **EU Work Plan for Youth**

The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states adopted a **resolution on an EU Work Plan for Youth (2014-2015)** ([9523/14](#)). It is a medium-term structured plan for 18 months, with a limited number of key initiatives in specific youth policy areas, so as to enable the EU and its member states to address urgently the high youth unemployment rates and the consequences of the current crisis for young people.

It sets out three priorities:

- development of youth work and non-formal and informal learning;
- enhancement of cross-sectoral co-operation; and
- empowerment, with a special focus on access to rights, autonomy, participation and active citizenship

It also aims to strengthen cooperation between member states and the Commission and develop synergies with education, training and employment policies in order to ensure youth policy input into the European Semester. The Work Plan will be evaluated in the second half of 2015.

### **Structured dialogue**

The Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states adopted a resolution on the structured dialogue process, including social inclusion of young people ([9026/14](#)).

The aim of the structured dialogue with young people is to serve as a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field, involving a wide range of young people and youth organisations in the consultations at all levels in the member states, at the EU Youth Conferences<sup>1</sup> and during the European Youth Week.

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<sup>1</sup> The last one took place in Thessaloniki from 10 to 12 March 2014  
<http://gr2014.eu/events/conferences-and-seminars/european-youth-conference>

The overall thematic priority for European cooperation in the youth field for the period 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2014 is social inclusion. The 18-month trio Presidency (Ireland, Lithuania and Greece) have together established specific priorities within the overall theme.

In 2013, the Irish Presidency focused on the contribution of quality youth work to enhancing the development, well-being and social inclusion of all young people and the Lithuanian Presidency put the emphasis on enhancing the social inclusion of young people, in particular young people not in employment, education and training (NEETs). During the first half of 2014, the Greek Presidency aimed at strengthening young people's entrepreneurial spirit.

The next cycle of the structured dialogue will be launched in the EU Youth Conference in October, under the Italian Presidency. Youth empowerment will be the priority theme for the next 18 months.

### **Youth entrepreneurship**

The Council adopted conclusions on **promoting youth entrepreneurship** to foster social inclusion of young people ([8378/14](#)), which is a horizontal priority for the Greek Presidency, given the still high youth unemployment levels in the EU and in particular in Greece <sup>1</sup>.

The conclusions focus on fostering social entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation and green jobs and invite member states to recognise the importance of entrepreneurial education from an early age, highlighting the role of non-formal and informal learning to ensure the autonomy and the personal development of young people, as well as to facilitate their successful integration into the labour market.

Entrepreneurship competences include transversal skills and attitudes, as well as knowledge, and youth work can be a key tool for developing those skills. In particular, the "social entrepreneurship" model, primarily aimed at contributing to the general good of society, can appeal to young people and give them the chance to provide innovative responses to the current economic, social and environmental challenges.

The European Union, via the Europe 2020 strategy and its flagship initiatives on "New skills and jobs", "Digital Agenda for Europe", "Innovation Union" and "Youth on the move"<sup>2</sup>, is promoting entrepreneurship by fostering skills and competences that can boost competitiveness and growth that will be smart, sustainable and inclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> 23.2% in the EU-28 and 23.8% in the Euro area (December 2013)

<sup>2</sup> See also: The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan (EAP)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/entrepreneurship-2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/entrepreneurship-2020/index_en.htm)

In this context, ministers discussed how to foster an entrepreneurial mindset among today's younger generation, on the basis of two questions prepared by the Presidency ([9012/14](#)). In order to contribute to a more open debate, the Presidency invited an external speaker, Mr Konstantinos Kollias (President of the Economic Chamber of Greece).

**Mr Kollias** considered that European education systems are lagging behind their European and Asian counterparts because their curricula are not adapted to the needs of the current work market. Education systems must improve "soft skills", group work, communication, which are primary requirements independently of the choice of studies. The EU has to adjust its policies to the young people needs and not the contrary.

Tax and assurance constraints are a burden for a starting entrepreneur and young people have also difficulties in accessing EU programmes in part because of red tape and in part because they have a restricted scope. Failure should not mean the end, it's also a learning experience and could be seen as the beginning of success.

The Commission took a broad interpretation of "entrepreneurship", considering it as the ability to detect opportunities. Every young person should have an entrepreneurship experience before completing their studies, eventually through non formal and informal learning which are an excellent way of "learning by doing". The Commissioner underlined that entrepreneurship education is one of the priorities of Erasmus +.

The main conclusions of the debate were the following:

- entrepreneurship education should start from an early age in school;;
- non-formal and informal learning have a key role in developing soft skills;
- "the freedom to fail" should be positively perceived but at the same time safety nets and services should be established;
- a monitoring system for young entrepreneurs should be developed;
- access to financing should be improved as well as bureaucratic barriers;
- a culture of entrepreneurship should be promoted.

**Other business**

– ***2nd European Youth Work Convention.***

The Council took note of information from Belgian delegation concerning the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, which will be held in 2015, during Belgian's presidency of the Council of Europe. The theme of the conference t will be youth work.

– ***Work programme of the incoming Presidency***

The Council took note of information from the Italian delegation on the work programme of the future Presidency, which will include the following priorities:

- Youth empowerment, in particular access to rights;
- Political participation of young people
- European public service



**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**GENERAL AFFAIRS**

**"Single audit" in the EU cohesion policy**

The Council adopted conclusions on the Court of Auditors' special report No 16/2013 entitled "Taking stock of 'single audit' and the Commission's reliance on the work of national audit authorities in cohesion, set out in [9187/14](#).

**COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**

**EUBAM Libya**

The Council allocated a budget of € 26.2 million for the European Union integrated border management assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya) for the period from 22 May 2014 until 21 May 2015, the current end of the mission's mandate.

**TRANSPARENCY**

**Public access to documents**

On 20 May 2014, the Council approved:

- the reply to confirmatory application No 11/c/01/14 (*8851/1/14 REV 1*).