

BRUSSELS, 11 September: The Lifelong Learning Platform vision on the Future of Europe - “The future of Europe is a Learning Europe for all its citizens!”

On 13 September 2017, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker will give his State of the Union speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. This follows the discussion on the way forward for Europe triggered by the Commission’s *White Paper on the future of Europe*, and in particular the five scenarios that it proposes. While it does underline the need for skills and lifelong learning, little attention is given to the next steps and concrete commitments in this regard. The Lifelong Learning Platform, European Civil Society for Education, together with its members, is happy that the European Commission will look more thoroughly at the social dimension of Europe, but we are concerned by the fact that it lacks an analysis of what really brings Europeans together and what drives European identity among its citizens. In light of Brexit and the ongoing crises affecting Europe, we are convinced that education and lifelong learning are precisely what will protect our unity.

Three key strands of actions are crucial in our view to bring Europeans together: **Europeans want to**

Meet & exchange: Mobility in order to learn and exchange ideas and experiences is key to create understanding and ownership of the European Union. Erasmus+ is the flagship programme of the European Union and one of the most successful European programmes that has created intercultural learning, lasting European friendships and a strong European identity for all those participating. LLLP believes that there is a clear need to further enlarge the accessibility of Erasmus+, consider how (young) people from disadvantaged backgrounds could participate in the programme and especially also how to include adults or older people, i.e. groups that are currently least convinced about the European project.

Participate & shape: ‘Brussels’ is very far away from most Europeans. Additionally, national politicians and media tend to blame ‘Brussels’ for everything unpopular while claiming all things positive for themselves even if the origin is ‘Brussels’. LLLP therefore proposes to bring the EU closer to European citizens and to provide them with the possibility to participate. It is extremely short-sighted that the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme has so few resources, so we suggest a considerable increase in funds for this programme as well as more opportunities for citizens to get involved.

Share & innovate: In Lifelong Learning, but also youth, culture, sports and research (as well as other areas) cooperation between people, institutions, SMEs etc. has led to an enormous transfer of innovation across Europe. Whether it is in small-scale strategic partnerships in Erasmus+, ESF and Horizon 2020 or in other exchange and cooperation programmes, this is where Europe can make enormous progress. The European Union has the real possibility to foster cooperation and innovation across Europe. It also has the opportunity to nurture areas where there is little commercial interest and therefore little outside financing available. LLLP therefore proposes a renewed effort to support exchanges and innovation across Europe.

In view of the above, LLLP considers the five possible scenarios for Europe's future outlined in the White Paper to be far from satisfactory. Scenario 1 of 'carrying on' as usual will not lead to the solutions required to strengthen the social dimension of Europe, nor meet the mobility and lifelong learning demands of its citizens. Scenario 2 of 'nothing but the single market' and Scenario 4 of 'doing less more efficiently' will do away with the decades of work invested in building European cooperation in the field of education and training, as well as undermine the rights of Europe's citizens. Scenario 3 of 'those who want more do more' will result in a race to the bottom in social standards between the Member States, which in turn is likely to jeopardise equal access to education and training opportunities.

Although Scenario 5 of 'doing much more together' offers a somewhat more constructive vision for Europe's future, LLLP remains unconvinced that it is the optimum solution. A more powerful European Union will not automatically lead to a fairer European Union. As acknowledged in the White Paper, this scenario risks further alienating the parts of Europe's population who see European integration as a distant concept, irrelevant to their own lives. Europe's future must be built with its citizens at the forefront, with a strong voice for civil society organisations and social partners. In that sense, fostering opportunities for everyone, regardless of age or background, to learn, develop skills, be mobile and gain employment should be the top priority for the European Union as it launches its vision for the future.

Indeed, a concrete way for the Union to deliver these opportunities is precisely through an enhanced Erasmus+ programme, where both a greater number and a wider range of people are able to participate, which in turn will have a positive long-term impact on society. The Erasmus+ Coalition - an initiative jointly led by LLLP and the European Youth Forum - will very shortly launch its 'Erasmusx10' campaign, advocating for a ten-fold increase to the Erasmus+ budget post-2020. European leaders, including President Juncker himself, have been calling for a significant increase to the programme budget and they must now deliver if they wish to salvage their citizens' faith in the European project.

All in all, as President Juncker prepares for his State of the Union address, LLLP wishes to send him the clear message that **learning is the future of Europe** – learning for innovation, learning for our future jobs, learning from and with each other, learning for our personal development and learning to foster our values of solidarity, peace and democracy.



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The [Lifelong Learning Platform](#) (LLL-P) is an umbrella organisation that gathers 40 European networks active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these organisations represent more than 50 000 educational institutions covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Established in 2005, LLL-P promotes a vision of lifelong learning based on equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and personal development. The platform works as a space for knowledge exchange between its member networks and uses their expertise to discuss and feed in EU policy-making, making sure that European citizens have their voice heard. In that sense LLL-P contributes to a better understanding and dialogue between the grassroots level and European institutions.