



Brussels, June 2012

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## EUCIS-LLL CALLS FOR A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In the past decade, European institutions have made steps for a more open, transparent and participative policy-making. Consultation has become an essential instrument since the Treaty of Amsterdam to legitimate European decision-making – and civil society organisations like EUCIS-LLL have naturally become flagship partners of the institutions. As the White Paper “European Governance” underlines in 2001: *“Civil society increasingly sees Europe as offering a good platform to change policy orientations and society. This offers a real potential to broaden the debate on Europe’s role. It is a chance to get citizens more actively involved in achieving the Union’s objectives and to offer them **a structured channel for feedback, criticism and protest.**”* In the same line, the “General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission” (2002) affirms the need for *“**a coherent approach to representation of civil society organizations at a European level**”*.

In the spirit of the Europe 2020’s partnership approach, **a structured dialogue has to be established in the field of education and training** to improve the implementation of the ET2020 work programme, as the proposed Regulation “Erasmus for all” points out: *“Support for policy reform action shall include the activities initiated at Union level related to (...) the **policy dialogue with relevant European stakeholders in the area of education, training and youth**”*. The open, transparent and regular dialogue evoked by the article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty is the only way to achieve successfully the EU strategic objectives in lifelong learning; and this will not be possible without clear mechanisms of communication, consultation and cooperation. A structured dialogue between civil society and the institutions has already been set up for the Youth sector while **no clear cooperation guidelines appear for education and training**. EUCIS-LLL, as the voice of civil society when it comes to lifelong learning, calls for this structured dialogue.

### I. LEGAL RECOGNITION OF A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A Structured Dialogue in Education and Training has to be formalized on a legal basis, as it was the case for Youth in 2005. This can be officially done in the framework of the Council Resolution on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in education and training (“ET2020”). Indeed, in order to develop lifelong learning policies in Europe, it is essential to engage education and training actors in decisions that affect their lives and jobs. This need has been recognised in many EU reports and communications<sup>1</sup> as crucial to reach

<sup>1</sup> Many references can be found on the need to establish a regular dialogue with civil society organizations and stakeholders:

- A “*partnership approach should extend to EU committees, to national parliaments and national, local and regional authorities, to social partners and to stakeholders and civil society so that everyone is involved in delivering on the vision*” for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – Communication from the Commission “Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”?, 3 March 2010, COM(2010) 2020 final.
- “*In the area of lifelong learning, partnership is needed because lifelong learning is a shared responsibility and no actor can achieve a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning policy alone.*” – High Level Group on “Critical factors for the implementation of lifelong learning strategies and policies”, 2010
- A “*strategic framework for cooperation in education and training involving all stakeholders*” at the EU level – New Skills for New Jobs flagship initiative, Communication from the Commission “Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”?, 3 March 2010, COM(2010) 2020 final.
- “*Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders should be promoted*” – Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.
- “*Support for policy reform action shall include the activities initiated at Union level related to (...) the policy dialogue with relevant European stakeholders in the area of education, training and youth*”, Regulation “Erasmus for All”, November 2011.

European targets and challenges. Setting up a Structured Dialogue appears to be a necessary and logic solution in this framework.

- **A dialogue based on clear aims and on a participative and sustainable approach**

To ensure ownership of the dialogue by all actors involved, its agenda and priorities should be decided together. A structured dialogue in education and training should have the following objectives:

- Provide a framework for the regular exchange of views and best practices, input into the policy-making process, follow-up and evaluation.
- Ensure that relevant institutions and actors are involved and, through a participatory and meaningfully structured dialogue, lead to common goals.
- Enrich decision-making and implementation processes in Europe by taking into account the views of the implementers.
- Promote the participation of educational actors and their associations at European, national and local level in the consultation process that concerns them.
- Develop synergies between actors and the European institutions to raise awareness on lifelong learning.
- Create ownership on the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training “ET2020”.

- **EUCIS-LLL, a privileged partner in the structured dialogue**

Implementing a Structured Dialogue in Education and Training would be highly facilitated by the fact that a civil society platform already exists as EUCIS-LLL. The European Commission would therefore do not need to form an artificial platform with a call for expression of interest, as it was done in the Culture field. EUCIS-LLL is the most legitimate platform of stakeholders in the field of Education and Training and has participated for many years in the civil dialogue with the EU institutions. Indeed, the European Commission acknowledged EUCIS-LLL as a “unique representation” of lifelong learning of the various education and training actors organised at EU level in 2009. It has co-organised with DG EAC the Stakeholders’ Forum on Education and Training Cooperation since 2008. The Commission’s 2011 annual work programme on grants and contracts for the Lifelong Learning Programme states that EUCIS-LLL is “*in a unique position to support European networks in education and training to work collectively at European, national and local levels and to contribute to a structured policy dialogue within the open method of coordination in education and training*”. It is also recognised as the representative of the education and training sector in the European Economic and Social Committee Liaison Group since 2004. EUCIS-LLL is thus a privileged actor for the EU and should be given a preminent role in the Structured Dialogue.

## II. GUIDELINES FOR A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Most of the elements to set up this dialogue are already there. It is a matter of strengthening and structuring existing informal practices by providing clear guidelines and adopting new consultation mechanisms. EUCIS-LLL is a pioneer of a structured dialogue in Education and Training and can already propose some efficient participation tools to develop this cooperation.

- **A European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue (coordination – EU level)**

A European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue responsible for the overall coordination, promotion, monitoring and evaluation of the structured dialogue on the model of the Steering Committee for Youth<sup>2</sup> should be set up. The Steering Committee would involve representatives of EU institutions, national authorities and the National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme. The Steering Committee would adopt priorities for each “ET2020” Cycle (2-year) and prepare recommendations for the European Council on a yearly basis. It would be responsible for the preparation and follow-up of national and European actions undertaken under the Structured Dialogue (European Stakeholders’ Forum, National consultations, etc) by collecting and disseminating the policy outcomes. The Steering Committee should be co-chaired by EUCIS-LLL and the DG EAC in order to ensure an efficient involvement and ownership of the process by stakeholders and public authorities.

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<sup>2</sup> This Committee meets each 18 months. It consists of inter alia representatives of the Trio Presidency countries’ Ministries for Youth Affairs, National Youth Councils and National Agencies for the Youth in Action Programme, as well as representatives of the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. The former is chairing this group.

- **Meetings with the European Commission (EU level) and the EU Presidency every 6 months**

Twice a year, meetings aimed to discuss policies with the different Units and Directorates of the Commission and with the EU Presidency are needed to ensure the coherence of the Lifelong Learning Agenda. These meetings would allow the different units/directorates to present their priorities and actions to Stakeholders who could give their opinion; share their good/bad practices; raise awareness on emerging priorities from the sectors. These meetings would aim to identify incoherencies or possible synergies between different EU policies and actions. They would also aim to work on the agenda of the European Conferences. EUCIS-LLL has the know-how and the capacity to gather the various stakeholders' in education and training and could facilitate the organisation of such meetings.

- **European Conferences on Education and Training (EU level)**

Conferences organised by the EU presidency could be organised in partnership with EUCIS-LLL on transversal topics or with its members and other relevant organisations on sectorial topics. A meeting of civil society organisations in the country could precede these high visibility events. These conferences would serve to bring up the results of national consultations and to integrate them all together with the inputs of European organisations. It would allow a bottom-up process and should develop greater ownership of the European decision-making process and notably on the ET2020 by linking it to local / national realities.

- **European Stakeholders' Forum in Education and Training (EU level)**

EUCIS-LLL has supported the setting up of a highly innovative initiative at the avant-garde of a structured dialogue: the European Stakeholders' Forums. EUCIS-LLL has been co-organising these Forums with the DG EAC on an annual basis since 2008. These Forums gather the main European stakeholders (social partners, civil society organisations and EU institutions) active in education and training at European level to ensure a broad consultation on the "ET2020" framework. The Forums proved to be very successful in gathering the main stakeholders, in creating new synergies among them and in providing political recommendations to decision-makers. These Forums should be continued and further strengthened in the future. Indeed, the 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)<sup>3</sup> mentions this Education & Training Forum that "*could in early October discuss progress in modernising education and training systems drawing on the discussion of education issues in the European Semester*" to strengthen the link between EU2020 and ET2020. EUCIS-LLL would like to set up an annual encounter the day before the Education, Youth and Culture (EYC) Council to present the outcomes of the Forum.

- **Civil society participation in EU expert groups (EU level)**

EUCIS-LLL should be invited to participate or nominate experts from its member networks in the various expert/working groups of the Directorate General for Education and Culture and notably in the Programme Committee. This will ensure that civil society stakeholders' views are taken on board in EU decision-making process.

- **Informal Fora with the Council of Education Ministers (EU level)**

An informal Forum composed of representatives of EUCIS-LLL and other educational actors, the current and future Council Presidencies, the European Parliament and the Commission should be set up and should meet regularly, in order to ensure consistency and continuity between agendas in the lifelong learning field. For instance,

- **European Lifelong Learning Week (EU level)**

EUCIS-LLL has been advocating for Lifelong Learning Weeks in Europe, on the model of the Youth Weeks. It has initiated a first European Lifelong Learning Week in the European Parliament in 2011. This event allowed to organise many events on education and training challenges in Europe and to create a dialogue amongst civil society organisations as well as between them and the EU institutions. This kind of event is in the line of the European Youth Weeks organised every two years at European level. Support could be provided within the Lifelong Learning Programme to for such events at the European, national and regional level. EUCIS-LLL also promoted the idea to have a "Lifelong Learning Day" in order to raise awareness on learning in a life-wide, life-long and Europe-wide perspective.

- **National Stakeholders Forums (National level)**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:070:0009:0018:EN:PDF>

In order to create an efficient and impactful dialogue with civil society, it is necessary to organise it at the national, regional and local levels too. EUCIS-LLL has conducted a survey and a feasibility study on setting up National Stakeholders Forums<sup>4</sup> that would involve all relevant stakeholders in education and training (that EUCIS-LLL has the capacity to map through its national members) to monitor and discuss the implementation of ET2020. These Forums would be organised on the model of the European Stakeholders' Forum in a multi-stakeholders, cross-sectorial perspective. The outcomes of the National Stakeholders' Forums would be presented at the European Conferences on Education and Training organised by the EU Presidency.

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EUCIS-LLL has already paved the way for consultation mechanisms<sup>5</sup> that are set up in the framework of a Structured Dialogue in Education and Training. Such dialogue is an essential support for policy reform action in education and training, and will reinforce the Open Method of Coordination. It is important to give coherence to EU policies and strategies in education, training and youth in order to reach the ambitious goals of the Europe 2020 and ET2020 strategies. Involving those representing millions of learners and educators/teachers in policy-shaping discussions is a matter of better governance. EUCIS-LLL and its members can be efficient partners of the EU to facilitate this process.

We remain available for further information.

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*The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 31 European networks working in education and training. Together, they cover all sectors of education and training including networks for secondary and higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education; networks for students, school heads, parents, HRD professionals, teachers and trainers. [www.eucis-lll.eu](http://www.eucis-lll.eu)*



<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eucis-lll.eu/pages/index.php/actions/research/40-national-stakeholders-forums-and-platforms>

<sup>5</sup> EUCIS-LLL is also advocating for a **European Status for European Associations** for their institutional recognition, as recommended by the conclusions of the European Economic and Social Committee's conference "A structured civil dialogue for a citizen-friendly European Union" (2010). It participates in a coalition of civil society organisations who led a successful campaign at the European Parliament to ask the European Commission to re-launch this dossier. [www.easea.eu](http://www.easea.eu)