Plate forme européenne de la société civile pour l'éducation tout au long de la vie
European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning

COMMUNICATION ON THE « EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020 »

EU member states and the European Commission have in recent years strengthened their political cooperation in the field of Education and Training. The Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") were adopted in May 2009. Building on progress made under the previous work programme, the framework defines strategic objectives for the period up to 2020 as well as priority areas for the first cycle 2009-2011.

EUCIS agrees with the need to put lifelong learning at the core of the European agenda in a worldwide perspective and wishes that Member states implement concretely the recommendations of the ET2020. However, if *"the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems…"* it also wishes to outline that education and training systems should also be aimed at the **quality of life of European citizens**.

EUCIS-LLL would notably like European Institutions and Members States to consider the following issues which we feel are insufficiently developed in the Council conclusions:
- Recognising the social dimension of education and training
- Consulting and involving civil society organisations
- Communicating on EU cooperation in Education and Training

1. Recognising the social dimension of education and training

In the context of economic crisis, it is necessary to propose greater ambitions for the EU educative and social agendas than is the ones proposed in the ET2020.

The employment and labour market dimensions of lifelong learning are often too dominant in EU legislation. Lifelong learning also aims to serve individuals' personal development and encompasses civic, social and economic facets. Lifelong learning does not only serve economic goals and competitiveness but the quality of life generally. It should be both a tool and a goal in itself. **The division of competences between the Member States and the EU contains a risk that the EU will adopt texts that are too much oriented to the labour market as this is within their competence – and lifelong learning is not.**

The Lisbon strategy identifies key challenges for the 21st Century: globalisation and competitiveness, demographic patterns in the EU (ageing population and migration flows), rapid changes in the nature of the labour market and the ICT revolution. We believe that **social cohesion, and notably social happiness and the quality of life, should also be identified as a key challenge.** For instance, **access to quality education for all could have been recognised as a strategic challenge in the ET2020.** Even though efforts are made, the number of persons who do not achieve upper secondary level is too high and the number of adults accessing adult education is still too low. This inequality is also reflected

within companies; access to employer funded training is often limited to those who are already well qualified. We would thus like the Member States to consider that **unequal access to education leads to unequal societies with high economic and social costs.**

For instance, persons from a migrant background often face socio-economic disadvantages that education and training systems tend to reproduce. Throughout the EU, we can observe a **phenomenon of segregation within education systems that has disastrous effects on social cohesion**. Initiatives coming from civil society, aiming to reduce segregation should be supported, also financially, by the Member states.

Guaranteeing quality education and training for all EU citizens will allow the EU to address the socio-economic challenges confronting it.

At national level, Member States should provide an **increased and sustainable investment in education and training, targeted on those facing a higher risk of marginalisation**. A sustainable financing of education and training represents a long term investment for the future of Europe and should not be considered as a budgetary variable. Many studies have shown the high costs of not investing in education and training in terms of income tax, health expenditure and public aid, crime rates or delinquency. Education and training promote **more inclusive, tolerant and democratic societies**. It is a key element of the **European social model that MEPs shall help to preserve notably in times of economic crisis**.

We thus regret that the European Council did not maintain the European Commission's proposal to set a benchmark on investment in higher education.

2. Consulting and involving civil society organisations

The platform regrets that there is no mention of concrete mechanisms to consult stakeholders in the conclusions. The implementation of a more structured civil dialogue would reinforce EU democracy and ensure a better involvement of citizens in the European integration process. These consultations should be organised with the appropriate resources (time, information etc.) so that a true process can take place, and cover the procedure from the drafting to the implementation and evaluation of actions. **At EU level**, for example, we welcome the European Commission's proposal to organise annual Stakeholders' Forums in education and training.

If the **Treaty of Lisbon** is ratified by all the Member States, it will include an **article 11 that brings recognition of the reality of participatory democracy.** We therefore expect European institutions and Member states to adopt a clear stance regarding our expectations in terms of civil dialogue[1]. For instance, EUCIS-LLL, with other organisations, supports the initiative to create a **European statute of association**.
Civil society organisations and networks at EU level working in education and training should be recognised for their role in promoting and supporting the creation of a Europe of knowledge. Many of the people working for stakeholder organizations actually do so on a voluntary basis. It is very difficult for them to get involved in voluntary work, notably in European organisations that lack financial support. This represents a barrier to their participation in consultation or policy discussion processes. **The European Commission and Member States**

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[1] EUCIS-LLL supports the manifesto "For a genuine civil dialogue" that will be officially launched by a group of civil society organisations and platforms in Brussels on 14th April 2009.

should adopt positive legislations for stakeholders to be able to fulfil their tasks and to become more active.

At EU level, a **European Institute for Lifelong Learning** could provide a forum for a regular and permanent consultation of stakeholders. It would have the objective of promoting the implementation of a coordinated and responsible policy on lifelong learning at European level and should be organised and administered with full cooperation between all stakeholders, including the representatives of organised civil society. This institute should not represent another agency but rather a permanent network of stakeholders in education and training.

We thus regret that the European Commission's chapter on Governance and partnership is not mentioned in the Councils' Conclusions. It outlined that "*Priority should also be given to a greater involvement of stakeholders and social and civil society partners, who have a considerable contribution to make both in the policy dialogue and in implementation*" (page 12).

3. Communicating on EU cooperation in Education and Training

There is a lack of knowledge about EU institutions. **Education to European citizenship should be reinforced, especially in formal education but also in teacher continuing and initial training.** Education and training play an important role in increasing interest and involvement in Europe. If we want a true European citizenship, Europeans need to understand and own the broader political system they are part of.

There is also a need to **reinforce communication around European policies, tools and initiatives** notably in the field of education and training. To face those challenges, EUCIS-LLL makes two concrete proposals :

- **The implementation of «Lifelong Learning National Councils»** in each Member State to guarantee an optimal implementation of national lifelong learning strategies.
- **The organisation of «Lifelong Learning Weeks»** in each Member State to raise citizens' awareness, in the manner of what already exists in some countries (i.e. the Green Week).

In order to address the **gap between national and European levels** (i.e. translating EU challenges and policies at national and local levels), public authorities need to **involve national key players. Indeed, the successful implementation of reforms requires the involvement of the different stakeholders** in the definition, implementation and evaluation of policies.

The platform is at the disposal of the Ministries and of the European institutions…

Yours sincerely,

Gina Ebner,
President of EUCIS-LLL
4th June 2009