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THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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3066th Council meeting

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

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President

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Main results of the Council

*In public deliberation, the Council held a policy debate on its **contribution to the European Semester**, in the framework of the 2011 Annual Growth Survey.*

*The Council adopted conclusions on the **role of education and training in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy**. In this context, ministers also took note of a presentation by the Commission of its communication: "An agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment".*

*The Council also adopted without debate a regulation which establishes the procedures and conditions applicable to the practical functioning of the **European citizens' initiative**.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

Adoption of the agenda

The Council adopted the agenda of the meeting ([6169/11](#)) by simple majority, with Italy and Spain voting against. These Member States requested the withdrawal from the agenda of the non-legislative "A" item 9 concerning a decision authorising enhanced cooperation in the area of unitary patent protection ([18115/10](#)). They considered that the Education Council was not the appropriate forum to deal with this issue and both made statements to be entered in the Council minutes.

Approval of the list of "A" items

The Council adopted, by simple majority, the "A" items as contained in [6181/11](#) .

The "A" items are generally adopted without debate. However, Article 3(6) of the Council's rules of procedure does not exclude the possibility for any Member of the Council or of the Commission to express an opinion and have a statement included in the minutes.

The Council also adopted the list of "A" items concerning non-legislative activities contained in [6182/11](#). "A" items concerning non-legislative activities are generally not taken in public deliberation, since they are not subject to the ordinary legislative procedure. Nevertheless, the Presidency accepted Italy's request to have **item 9** discussed in public.

Contribution of education and training to the new European Semester

Ministers held a policy debate on the basis of three questions prepared by the Presidency:

1. How do you assess the statements made in relation to education and training in the 2011 Annual Growth Survey ([18066/10](#))?
2. How feasible do you consider the achievement of the EU headline targets for education¹ in the light of the assessment contained in the Europe 2020 Progress Report ([18066/10 ADD 1](#))?
3. What do you consider are the most urgent measures to be taken in the field of education and training and brought to the attention of the Spring European Council?

Ministers agreed in general with the statements made in relation to education in the Annual Growth Survey and acknowledged that, although progress has been made, more efforts would be needed to meet the education targets by 2020. Member states also underlined that the national reform programmes presented so far were provisional and that work was ongoing. A significant number of countries are in the process of implementing ambitious educational reforms, even in the current difficult economic situation, and all were determined to reduce the rate of early school leavers.

Several ministers also pointed out that when it came to education issues the focus should not be only on figures: the human factor and qualitative interventions were also extremely important. In this context, several member states stressed the importance of the role of teachers in the educational process and called for more efficient and regular professional development programmes for teachers.

Most member states also recalled the importance of establishing lifelong learning strategies, including making vocational training more attractive and promoting adult learning, since people now have longer working lives and this increases the need to continue acquiring and developing new skills throughout life.

¹

- to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10%;
- to ensure a 40% share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary (or equivalent) education.

A large number of member states agreed that reinforcing key competences, promoting skills development and developing the capacities of the workforce to adapt to the needs of the labour market constituted priorities. Policy actions to combat youth unemployment and to encourage creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship should therefore be actively pursued, as well as the exchange of good practices.

Ministers agreed that the crucial importance of investing in education and research in order to create more employment and boost competitiveness should be one of the main messages to pass on to the Spring European Council.

Together with the outcomes of the other sectoral Councils, the Presidency will forward - via the General Affairs Council - a summary of these debates to the Spring European Council. On this basis, the Heads of State and Government will then give strategic advice on policies. This guidance can then be taken into account when the Member States draw up their national reform programmes, setting out the precise action they intend to undertake in order to meet the 2020 Strategy headline targets.

The role of education and training in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The Council adopted the conclusions set out in document ([5505/11](#)). The conclusions invite the Member States to invest efficiently in high quality, modernised education and training and to address the problem of early school leavers and, as a matter of urgency, the situation of young people who currently face exceptional difficulties in entering the labour market due to the severity of the crisis.

The conclusions also invite member states to integrate education and training policies into their National Reform Programmes and to strengthen horizontal cooperation and the sharing of experience and good practice, in particular with employment ministries, but also with other stakeholders such as the social partners, when designing and reporting on the implementation of national employment policies.

Furthermore, cooperation between higher education institutions, research institutes and enterprises should be reinforced as the basis for a more innovative and creative economy.

Agenda for new skills and jobs

Ministers welcomed the presentation by the Commission of its flagship initiative "An Agenda for new skills and jobs: a European contribution towards full employment ([17066/10](#)), which is part of the Europe 2020 Strategy and which, like the *Youth on the Move initiative*, presented to the Council last November¹, has significant implications for the education and training sector, since it seeks to help individuals to acquire new skills and adapt to a changing labour market.

In order to achieve the European Union's **employment rate target of 75% for the 20-64 age group by 2020**, the initiative establishes four key priorities:

- a better functioning labour market
- a more skilled workforce
- better job quality and working conditions
- stronger policies to promote job creation and demand for labour.

The main responsibility and the instruments to achieve these objectives lie with the Member States, but the Agenda proposes 13 key actions with preparatory and concrete accompanying measures in order to implement the four priorities. The initiative also calls for closer collaboration between the education and employment sectors.

¹ Aiming to help young people achieve their full potential in training and education and thereby improve their employment prospects.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Council extends arrangements for Development Fund for Iraq

The Council adopted a decision extending until 31 June 2011 the arrangements for the depositing into the Development Fund for Iraq of proceeds from export sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas and the arrangements concerning immunity from legal proceedings of certain Iraqi assets. This is in accordance with UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1956 (2010) extending the arrangements set out in UNSCR 1483 (2003) and 1546 (2004).

The Council also adopted a regulation implementing the above measures in the EU.

Council Decision 2011/.../CFSP amending Common Position 2003/495/CFSP on Iraq and Council Regulation (EU) No .../2011 amending Regulation (EC) No 1210/2003 concerning certain specific restrictions on economic and financial relations with Iraq will be published in the Official Journal of the EU on 15 February 2011.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Adoption of new "comitology" rules

The Council adopted a regulation laying down new rules for the control by member states of the Commission's exercise of its implementing powers ([64/10](#) + [5768/11](#)), following a first-reading agreement with the European Parliament.

The new regulation is intended to put into practice article 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on **implementing acts**. It replaces Council decision 1999/468 on the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission ("comitology" decision) as far as the consultation, management and regulatory procedures are concerned. **Delegated acts** as provided for in article 290 of the TFEU cover almost the same type of measures as those adopted so far under the "regulatory procedure with scrutiny" which the Council introduced into the "comitology" decision in 2006.

For more details, see our press release [6378/11](#).

INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

European citizens' initiative

The Council adopted a regulation making it possible for EU citizens to call for legislative proposals on a specific issue ([65/10](#) + [5769/11 ADD 1](#)).

The so-called *European citizens' initiative*, one of the main innovations under the Treaty of Lisbon, will enable citizens to ask the Commission to bring forward legislative proposals if the supporters of an initiative number at least one million and come from a significant number of member states.

The Treaty of Lisbon¹ introduced a new dimension of participatory democracy, alongside that of representative democracy on which the EU is founded, with the aim of bringing the EU closer to its citizens by encouraging more cross-border debate about EU issues.

The regulation sets out the procedures and conditions for implementing the citizens' initiative.

For details, see press release [6469/11](#).

INTERNAL MARKET

Unitary patent protection - Enhanced cooperation

The Council decided to request the consent of the European Parliament to a draft decision aimed at authorising enhanced cooperation with a view to creating a unitary patent protection system in the EU ([5538/11](#) and [5566/11](#)).

In accordance with article 329(1) of the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU), the consent of the Parliament is necessary prior to the Council's authorisation to launch enhanced cooperation between several member states.

¹ The Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on 1 December 2009.

TRANSPORT

First-reading position on the "Eurovignette" directive*

The Council adopted¹ its first-reading position on a draft directive on road use charges for heavy goods vehicles ("Eurovignette"), which allows the levying of tolls that factor in the cost of air and noise pollution and take account of road congestion ([15145/1/10](#) + [5767/11 ADD 1 REV 1](#)).

The draft directive, which amends the "Eurovignette" directive adopted in 1999, aims at reducing pollution from road freight transport and making traffic more fluent by differentiated charging of vehicles depending on the type and the emissions of the vehicle, the distance travelled, the location and the time of road use. This is intended to encourage the move to transport patterns more respectful of the environment.

For more details, see press release [6350/11](#).

The Council's first-reading position and the statement of the reasons on which this position is based ([15145/1/10 ADD 1](#)) will now be sent to the European Parliament for a second reading.

Interoperability of the European rail system - telematics applications for passenger services

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of a regulation on the technical specification for interoperability relating to the subsystem "telematics applications for passenger services" of the trans-European rail system ([17776/10](#)).

The purpose of this technical specification is to define procedures and interfaces between all types of actors to provide information and issue tickets to passengers via widely available technologies.

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny; now that the Council has given its consent the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

¹ The Italian and Spanish delegations voted against, and the Irish, Dutch and Portuguese delegations abstained.

SOCIAL POLICY

Statistics on net social protection benefits and on transition from work to retirement

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of two Commission regulations concerning statistics in the field of social policy. One regulation provides for implementing rules concerning the European system of integrated social protection statistics (ESSPROS) and relates, more specifically, to the launch of full data collection for the ESSPROS module on net social protection benefits ([17659/10](#)). The other regulation establishes the specifications of the 2012 ad hoc module on transition from work to retirement, ensuring a comprehensive and comparable set of data in order to monitor progress towards the common objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy ([17848/1/10](#)).

The Commission regulations are subject to the so-called 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.

ENVIRONMENT

Hazardous substances in vehicles

The Council did not oppose a Commission directive updating annex II of directive 2000/53, which contains a list of exemptions from the ban on hazardous substances in vehicles and their spare parts ([17617/10](#)). Directive 2000/53 on end-of-life vehicles prohibits the use of lead, mercury, cadmium or hexavalent chromium in vehicles and their components put on the market after 1 July 2003. Member states must transpose the changes into national law by 31 December 2011.

The Commission directive 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 the directive, unless the European Parliament objects.

HEALTH**Maximum pH values for platelet concentrates**

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission directive removing the maximum pH value for all platelet concentrates listed in Annex V to directive 2004/33 on technical requirements for blood and blood components (*17786/1/10 REV 1 + 17786/1/10 REV 1 COR 1*).

The Commission directive 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.
