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Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

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Presidents **Stefania Giannini**
Minister for Education
Luigi Bobba
State secretary for Labour and Social Policies

P R E S S

Main results of the Council

EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship in education and training

The Council adopted conclusions on entrepreneurship in education and training, which highlight the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills from an early age and of reinforcing links between the education system and the business world, in line with the June European Council's call "to promote a climate of entrepreneurship and job creation". Entrepreneurship and education are also priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The economic case for education and training

In the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, Education ministers and Employment ministers from Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg held a public debate on "The economic case for education and training".

The President of the Council, Minister Stefania Giannini said, "*The Italian Presidency intended to reaffirm the crucial role of education in boosting economic growth and in creating jobs. To meet this goal, today's Council conclusions on entrepreneurship in education, the debate on the added value of investing in quality education and training with a long-term perspective, and the discussion on how to enhance international mobility through structured curricular mobility experiences, set important milestones.*"

Budget

The Council also confirmed, without debate, the political agreement reached on the 2015 EU budget and the pending draft amending budgets for 2014.

YOUTH

Young people's access to rights

The Council adopted conclusions on young people's access to rights in order to foster their autonomy and participation in civil society. They address the challenges for this generation of young people, who must suffer the fall-out of the financial crisis, and in particular their difficulties in becoming autonomous adults who participate in a critical and active way in the social, political and economic life of their own communities. Luigi Bobba, Italian Secretary of State for Labour and Social Policy noted that, "*The conclusions invite member states to put in place a wide range of instruments and measures in order to remove obstacles which prevent young people from living an autonomous life.*"

Socio-economic challenges in the youth field

In a public session, ministers also discussed a cross-sectoral approach to youth policies as a tool for better tackling socio-economic challenges in this field. Cross-sectoral policy cooperation is also one of the key priorities of the newly adopted EU Work Plan for Youth. State Secretary Luigi Bobba said, *"the debate confirmed that the cross-sectoral approach is the path to follow, at European as well as at national level, to ensure more concrete and efficient youth policies"*.

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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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ITEMS DEBATED

EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship in education and training

The Council adopted conclusions on entrepreneurship in education and training ([14402/14](#)), which highlight the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills from an early age and of reinforcing links between the education system and the business world, in line with the June European Council's call "to promote a climate of entrepreneurship and job creation"¹ in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The conclusions invite member states to fully exploit the potential that the Erasmus+ programme offers in supporting entrepreneurship education, in particular through knowledge alliances for higher education and sectoral skills alliances for vocational education and training², as well as to make the best use of other European resources such as the European Social Fund.

Entrepreneurship requires an understanding of economics and how businesses work, but equally importantly it calls for a range of interdisciplinary skills and competences (such as a sense of initiative and the ability to take risks, to think critically and creatively, to organise and show leadership, and the capacity to communicate and persuade others), which education institutions should seek to develop in learners, as part of a gradual and continuous process covering all levels and, as far as possible, across the curriculum.

Several member states briefly presented some of their national experiences in this field. They pointed out the need to facilitate access to finance and reduce 'red tape' for young entrepreneurs, encouraging risk taking and developing tailor-made approaches.

Commissioner Navracsics stated that the new Commission is fully committed to developing entrepreneurship in education, recalling that SMEs form the bedrock of the European economy. He drew attention to two new tools which the Commission has developed in this sector: HEInnovate (<https://heinnovate.eu/intranet/main/index.php>), which has been very well received by higher education institutions, and Entrepreneurship360, which will be launched next year for schools and vocational education training institutions.

¹ *EUCO 79/14, p. 15.*

² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/knowledge-alliances-sector-skills-alliances-eacs1113_en

The economic case for education and training

In the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, ministers held a public debate on "The economic case for education and training". The employment ministers from the current presidency trio also took part in the debate, which constituted the education sector's contribution to the synthesis report on the 2020 strategy review to be forwarded to the December European Council.

The Presidency briefed the Council on the discussion held the previous day in the Employment Council on the subject "Investing in Youth Employment". The minister also underlined that the current debate was taking place at a very opportune moment, when the strategic direction of the European policy agenda is being redefined.

Employment ministers from Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg welcomed the Presidency's initiative in inviting them to participate, as this emphasised the importance of a cross-sectoral approach to restoring Europe's competitiveness and potential for growth, building on strategic investments in education.

They also called for rapid and efficient implementation of the Youth Guarantee, in particular to help reduce early school leaving and the current high rate of NEETs.

Commissioner Navraetsics also applauded the "back-to-back" configuration with the EPSCO Council and hoped that cooperation of this kind could be continued.

He confirmed that education is a top priority of the new Commission and deplored the fact that many member states had cut their education budgets in 2012, while understanding the economic difficulties some of them are facing. He called on member states to prioritise investments in this field, since education always pays dividends in the medium and long term.

The Commission also highlighted the fact that two of the strategy's headline targets for education are well on track to be achieved in 2020, although there are significant variations between member states:

- the proportion of early school leavers (12% in 2013, 10% in 2020)
- the percentage of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education (36.9% in 2013, 40% in 2020)

He acknowledged that education should not be only a means to enter the labour market, but given the worrying high levels of unemployment, a smooth transition between the two should be ensured.

During the debate, ministers underlined that education has played and will continue to play a crucial role in the success of the Europe 2020 strategy, since high-quality education and the development of skills are prerequisites for the growth, innovation, competitiveness and jobs that Europe needs.

A number of member states recalled, however, that education had an intrinsic value and should not merely be regarded as a means to find employment, but also as the basis for personal development, citizenship and social inclusion.

The main issues highlighted were the following:

- the double headline target for education should be maintained, particularly in relation to reducing early school leaving
- basic skills should be improved, vocational education made more attractive and opportunities for adult learning and second-chance education promoted
- sustained investment is needed, although it is essential to allocate resources efficiently
- efforts should be made to develop and extend the availability of online education tools and promote digital learning
- to prevent a widening gap between curriculum development and the rapidly evolving demands of labour markets, the innovation sector and society, it is important to strengthen the links between the world of work and that of education, at both secondary and tertiary level
- a comprehensive approach to education and training should be maintained, covering all levels of education from early childhood through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning

Other business

– *Work programme of the incoming Presidency*

The Latvian delegation presented its priorities for the coming semester:

- mid-term review of the 'ET2020' framework and preparation of the 2015 joint report
- strengthening the links between the Europe 2020 strategy and 'ET2020'
- preparation for the Bologna ministerial conference in May in Yerevan, Armenia
- recognition of skills and diplomas

YOUTH

Before starting with the formal items in the agenda, Secretary of State Luigi Bobba informed ministers about the outcome of the informal forum with the youth representatives (the “structured dialogue”), which addressed **voluntary activities and civilian service**. In this context, the presidency outlined its project for creating a European civil service, taking into account the different practices in members states, aimed at broadening the basis of European citizenship and strengthening the participation of young people in democratic processes.

Young people's access to rights

The Council adopted conclusions on young people's access to rights in order to foster their autonomy and participation in civil society ([15613/14](#)). They address the challenges for this generation of young people, who must suffer the fallout of the financial crisis, and in particular their difficulties in becoming autonomous adults who participate in a critical and active way in the social, political and economic life of their own communities.

The conclusions acknowledge that the combined effect of factors caused by the economic crisis, such as limited access to credit, income reduction and greater job instability, often without adequate welfare measures being guaranteed, has diminished young people's capacity for autonomy.

They also highlight the need to develop strategies and policies that not only favour the transition from school to work, but that also act in related areas such as access to credit, housing, healthcare, access to services, and education, in order to provide the necessary tools to support young people's progress towards autonomy and citizenship.

Socio-economic challenges in the youth field

In the follow-up to the conclusions, ministers also discussed a cross-sectoral approach to youth policies as a tool for better tackling socio-economic challenges in this field. Cross-sectoral policy cooperation is also one of the key priorities of the recently adopted EU Work Plan for Youth¹.

Ministers acknowledged that despite the high political priority of tackling youth unemployment and its consequences at national and EU level, youth policy has not made a sufficient contribution to the work of other sectors. Furthermore, the different policy areas that are critical to improving the prospects of young people – employment, education, social affairs and health – do not always work together in the most efficient manner.

Ministers underlined the importance of measures aimed at promoting young people's inclusion through educational, training and associative activities that offer possibilities for gaining experience and provide practical learning opportunities which improve the lives, knowledge and skills of young people.

Member states have already put in place or are developing many projects and programmes at national level to fight youth unemployment and social exclusion.

The main issues highlighted in the debate were the following:

- young people's interdisciplinary skills need to be improved through non-formal and informal learning and civic engagement
- the possibilities offered by European funding and programmes, in particular Erasmus + and the Youth Guarantee, should be fully explored

¹ OJ C 183/2014

- it is crucial to involve young people themselves, in particular NEETS, in order to inform youth policy-making at all levels and implement tailor-made approaches
- cooperation and synergies between local, national and European authorities in all youth-related sectors must be improved
- the regular exchange of best practices among member states should be increased

Other business

– ***EU-Youth Democracy Project***

The Council took note of information from the German delegation on the project "Young Europe - Rethinking Democracy" ([16189/14](#)). In the context of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, 120 young people aged between 18 and 30 from all 28 EU member states went on a 5-day train ride from Berlin to Vienna and back, in order to discuss the identity crisis of young people in and with Europe. A declaration was issued at the end of the project, which was financed by German national funds and Erasmus +.

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

The Latvian delegation presented its main priorities for the coming semester

- Implementation of the EU Work Plan for Youth
- Contribution of youth policies to Europe 2020

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

BUDGETS

Approval of 2015 EU budget and of draft amending budgets for 2014

The Council confirmed the political agreement reached on the 2015 EU budget and the pending draft amending budgets for 2014.

The agreement reached with the European Parliament comprises the following elements:

- the 2015 EU budget for which total payments are set at €141.2 billion and total commitments at €145.3 billion; the UK delegation abstained
- draft amending budget no 3/2014, adding €3.5 billion in payments to the 2014 budget, out of which €3.2 billion is financed by the contingency margin and €361 million stems from below the ceiling of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020; this draft amending budget also incorporates additional revenue amounting to €1.6 billion from fines; the Dutch, Swedish and UK delegations voted against
- draft amending budget no 4/2014 as modified by its letter of amendment, incorporating into the 2014 budget additional revenue amounting to €2.4 billion mainly from fines
- draft amending budget no 5/2014, mobilising €47.0 million in commitments out of the EU solidarity fund in 2014 in order to remedy damages caused by floods in Italy (€16.3 million), an earthquake in Greece (€3.7 million), as well as ice storms in Slovenia (€18.4 million) and Croatia (€8.6 million); the UK delegation abstained
- draft amending budget no 6/2014 as modified by its letter of amendment, entering into the 2014 EU budget an amount of €4.5 billion resulting from a revised forecast of the EU revenue and diminishing the GNI contributions accordingly; the UK delegation abstained
- draft amending budget no 7/2014, mobilising €79.7 million in commitments in 2014 out of the EU solidarity fund to remedy damages caused by floods in Serbia (€60.2 million), Bulgaria (€10.5 million) and Croatia (€9.0 million); the UK delegation abstained
- draft amending budget no 8/2014, incorporating the 2013 financial surplus of €1.01 billion into the 2014 budget; the UK delegation abstained

The European Parliament is expected to formally approve these elements on 17 December.

- [Details of the agreement - overview](#)
- [Further details](#)
- [Press release from 9 December 2014 with full details of the agreement](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Bank recovery and resolution: levies

The Council decided not to object to the adoption by the Commission of a regulation supplementing the bank recovery and resolution directive (2014/59/EU) as regards the method for calculating the ex-ante contributions banks have to pay to resolution financing arrangements ([14545/14](#) + [14545/14 ADD1](#) + [14545/14 ADD2](#) + [14545/14 ADD3](#) + [14545/14 ADD4](#) + [14545/14 ADD5](#)).

The regulation is a delegated act pursuant to article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects.

Banks will have to make annual contributions to national resolution funds. These will be calculated on the basis of their liabilities, excluding own funds and covered deposits, and adjusted for risk. The delegated act specifies how to account for risk and what the relation should be between a flat contribution rate (i.e. that which all banks must pay) and a risk-adjusted rate, which will range between 0.8 and 1.5.

The Council on 9 December also reached a political agreement on an implementing regulation determining the contributions to be paid by banks to the EU's Single Resolution Fund (for details see [16645/14](#)).

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Restrictive measures - Syria

The Council prohibited the export of jet fuel and relevant additives to Syria as they are being used for indiscriminate air attacks against civilians. This decision gives legal value to a political agreement reached at the Foreign Affairs Council of 20 October.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 12 December 2014, the Council approved:

- the reply to confirmatory application No 32/c/01/14 ([15354/14](#))
