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Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

Education

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President **Li Andersson**
Minister of Education

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026
press.office@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>

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¹ • 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

A strong economic base for Europe: pursuing effectiveness, efficiency and quality in education and training - public policy debate

Based on a presidency discussion paper ([13295/19](#)), ministers for finance and education held a public debate on the above topic. They were invited to have an exchange of views based on the following questions:

- Which challenges are the most pressing for your country when it comes to the efficiency and effectiveness of education and training?
- Which policies do you see as most promising when promoting efficiency, effectiveness, inclusiveness and equality in education and training?
- How can high-quality learning outcomes, high levels of educational attainment and equality be achieved simultaneously?

During the debate, ministers identified the following main challenges both at national and EU level:

- rapid digital and social transformation
- skills shortages
- teacher shortages
- huge demand for vocational training
- climate change

To address these challenges, ministers highlighted the importance of updating and enriching school curriculums, investing in early childhood education and bridging the gap between skills and market needs. Some participants also stressed the need to improve teachers' competences, in particular in the area of digital skills. There was broad agreement that investment in education and training, including in adult and lifelong learning, was the best way to foster growth, fight poverty and promote equality and social inclusion. Ministers also highlighted the importance of cooperation at EU level through the exchange of best practices and further promotion of student mobility.

The importance of education and training and of human capital has been widely recognised at EU level. Education and training are already part of the Europe 2020 strategy and the role of education, skills and lifelong learning was highlighted in the 2019 country-specific recommendations (CSRs). The European Council's strategic agenda for 2019-2024 emphasises the importance of education and training for both the economy and society and calls for investment in people's skills and education to be stepped up.

Conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies

Ministers adopted conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition in support of inclusive and sustainable growth ([13282/19](#)).

The conclusions highlight that investing in basic skills and key competences is more relevant than ever and that lifelong learning is a crucial factor for elderly people's participation in social and economic life. The conclusions also invite member states to develop strategies to boost lifelong learning policies and to recognise the potential of lifelong learning in supporting inclusive and sustainable growth. The text also calls on the Commission and member states to support initiatives that facilitate investment in lifelong learning.

Resolution on further developing the European education area to support future-oriented education and training systems

Ministers adopted a resolution on further developing the European education area ([13298/19](#)). The resolution deals with the role of future-oriented education and training systems in the context of the ongoing discussions on the future of Europe, as well as in the implementation of the new strategic agenda for 2019-2024, adopted by the European Council in June 2019. It invites the Commission, when further developing the European education area, to recall and take into account the ambition of underpinning the area with lifelong learning, stretching from early childhood education and care to continuous adult learning. The resolution also invites member states and the Commission to further develop European cooperation on education at all levels of education and training and invites them to further develop and raise awareness of the European Universities Initiative.

The idea for a European education area was first put forward at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017 where EU heads of state and government underlined the role of education and training in boosting competitiveness, growth, employability and social inclusion. Among the most notable initiatives to achieve this goal is "the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities"¹.

¹ [European Council conclusions \(14 December 2017\)](#).

Artificial intelligence in education and training - public debate

Ministers for education held a debate on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education and training, based on a presidency discussion paper ([13297/19](#)).

They were invited to exchange views and share experiences in relation to the following questions:

1. What kind of education and training policies and measures at EU and member state level should be developed to steer AI design and use? How can we ensure that AI benefits society as a whole and that Europe can compete successfully at global level?
2. What action could be taken by the EU together with member states in order to enable and advance the use of AI in education and training now and within the next 10 years?

Ministers agreed that AI will soon have a huge impact on education and training systems across Europe. They identified some of the possible steps in relation to the increasing role of AI:

- integrating AI in educational systems and training
- introducing coding in early school years
- introducing interdisciplinary studies to fully understand the functioning of AI and its interaction with people
- assisting the development of critical thinking and problem solving, which will enable people to not rely entirely on AI

Ministers also raised the issue of ethics and data protection and warned that the extensive use of AI in the future had to be accompanied by measures to prevent AI being misused or acting in a harmful way.

Any other business

1. The Slovenian delegation briefed ministers on Slovenia's proposal to establish the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) under the auspices of UNESCO ([13173/19](#)).
2. The incoming Croatian presidency presented its work programme in the area of education. Among the priorities presented were:
 - teaching new skills
 - reconsidering the place of education in the European Semester process
 - a new strategic framework for European cooperation on education and training - ET 2030
 - further developing the European education area
 - Erasmus+
 - European Universities

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed

The Council adopted a recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed ([12753/19](#)).

The objective is to support all workers, in particular those in non-standard forms of employment, and the self-employed who are not sufficiently covered by social protection schemes.

The proposed recommendation encourages member states to provide opportunities to all workers and the self-employed to join social protection schemes, and to take measures allowing all workers and the self-employed to build up and take up social benefits as members of a scheme.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EU position for the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council

The Council established the position of the European Union for the 15th meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council taking place in Brussels on 11 November 2019.

The Cooperation Council will discuss bilateral relations under the current EU-Uzbekistan partnership and cooperation agreement.

[EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council](#) (meeting page)

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Schengen evaluation - Lithuania

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2018 evaluation of **Lithuania** on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of the **Schengen Information System** ([13898/19](#)).

Schengen evaluation - Lithuania

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2018 evaluation of **Lithuania** on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of management of the **external borders** ([13899/19](#)).

Schengen evaluation - Lithuania

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2018 evaluation of **Lithuania** on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of **return** ([13900/19](#)).

AGRICULTURE

Council decision requesting a Commission study on the status of novel genomic techniques

The Council adopted a decision asking the Commission to submit a study on novel genomic techniques under EU law, in the light of the Court of Justice's judgment in case C-528/16 ([12781/19](#)).

Recent developments in new breeding techniques have raised a series of practical questions for national competent authorities on whether such new breeding techniques come under the definition of a GMO and the scope of directive 2001/18/EC and, as a consequence, whether products obtained by means of these techniques should be subject to the obligations laid down in directive 2001/18/EC.

In its judgment in case C-528/16 , the Court of Justice, after considering the overall objectives of directive 2001/18/EC, ruled that new mutagenesis techniques fall within the scope of that directive and are subject to the obligations laid down therein.

Council decision requesting a Commission study on updating the existing legislation on plant reproductive material

The Council adopted a decision asking the Commission to submit a study on the Union's options for updating the existing legislation on the production and marketing of plant reproductive material ([12783/19](#)).

On 6 May 2013, the Commission submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council a proposal for a regulation on the production and making available on the market of plant reproductive material, with the aim of updating the existing legislation in order to address several areas of concern. The Parliament rejected the proposal in 2013 and the Commission consequently withdrew it; now the Council is requesting a new study in order to reassess the options for updating the existing legislative framework.

EU position for the 8th session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken by the EU during the upcoming negotiations on the revision of the Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA), to be discussed at the 8th session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Rome, 11-16 November 2019).

The revision of the SMTA is expected to provide an incentive to conserve and use the plant genetic resources of a wider range of species and generate increased user-based income to invest in crop diversity, leading to increased food security.

FISHERIES**EU-Mauritania: extension of the protocol on the implementation of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement and fishing opportunities**

The Council adopted a decision on the signing and provisional application of an agreement in the form of an exchange of letters between the EU and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania on an extension to the protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for in the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania ([12924/19](#)).

The protocol is due to expire on 15 November 2019.

The Council also agreed in principle on the decision on the conclusion of the above agreement in the form of an exchange of letters ([12928/19](#)), and to forward it, together with the text of the agreement ([12927/19](#)), to the European Parliament for its consent.

Finally, the Council adopted the regulation on the allocation of fishing opportunities under the protocol ([12929/19](#)).
