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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems

(2019/C 389/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE,

UNDERLINES THAT:

1. Europe is facing an era in which globalisation, technological progress, sustainability challenges, persistent social inclusion challenges, political instability and demographic change are having a profound impact on European societies and citizens. These common challenges require common reflection and coordinated actions from the Member States;

2. The role of education and training in promoting citizenship and democracy, personal development, social inclusion, equal opportunities and empowerment, and in fostering wellbeing and supporting cohesive societies, are priorities for future cooperation in this area. The two main societal roles of education and training – their contribution to competitiveness, innovation and employability and their contribution to active citizenship, social inclusion, cohesion and personal development – are closely intertwined and fully complementary in today's societies;

3. Education and training are key policy instruments for creating and maintaining sustainable growth and competitiveness and fostering employment and labour market participation at European level. Their potential in tackling broader societal challenges should be fully recognised when preparing the new growth strategy for the Union. High-quality education and training give the Union a competitive edge in an increasingly digital and knowledge-based global economy, as in the future, Europe will depend even more on creative, highly skilled and well trained people. It will also be vital to steer the development and deployment of new technologies and support the Union's transition into a circular and climate-neutral economy by fostering the knowledge, skills and competences needed to drive forward these changes;

4. European cooperation in the fields of education and training is an essential policy instrument for preparing innovative, future-oriented and responsive strategies to address these common challenges, whilst respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and the rich diversity of education and training systems within the Union;

IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTING THE NEW STRATEGIC AGENDA 2019-2024 AS SET BY THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON 20 JUNE 2019,

UNDERLINES THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING AT ALL ITS LEVELS AND FORMS IN IMPLEMENTING THE MAIN PRIORITIES OF THE STRATEGIC AGENDA, IN ENABLING PEOPLE TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY CURRENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND IN ALLOWING TALENT IN EUROPE TO FLOURISH, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE FOLLOWING:

5. Investing in high-quality education and training for all brings substantial benefits not only to citizens but also to the economy and society. Investment in competences needs to cover all stages of learners' lives. Achieving quality educational outcomes requires appropriate resources that need to be well balanced along the entire lifelong learning pathway;

6. Investment in education, training and skills needs to be promoted at European and national levels. There is a need for effective, innovative working methods, which foster a capacity-building approach and support the development of education and training systems through smart and strategic investment. Specific attention should be paid to boosting competences that will be relevant in the future, the strategic use of digitalisation and innovation funding, modernised education infrastructure, innovative and safe learning environments and improved pedagogical approaches, as well as to enhancing access to and the quality of lifelong guidance services. Investment could include further development of the European Education Area and improving synergies between European funding instruments as well as between EU policies and funding instruments relevant for education and training;

7. The potential of education and training to contribute to achieving a climate-neutral and green Europe needs to be fully explored. Education and training are crucial in providing the knowledge, skills and competences and in fostering the values and motivation which are fundamental to enabling fair and equitable social transformation. European action for Green Europe, built on the Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning and the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, needs to involve all levels and all forms of education and training and all stages of life, enabling activities initiated at local and regional level and in cooperation with civil society, with the aim of moving forward towards the implementation of the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals;

8. The European Pillar of Social Rights should be implemented at European and Member State levels, with due regard to respective competences. The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning should be respected at every stage of life, from early childhood to older age, and at all levels and forms of education and training, in synergy with efforts made in connection with the European Education Area. Implementation should pay special attention to effective accessibility, equal opportunities and inclusion policies, ensuring access and transitions to lifelong learning;

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISION OF A EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA BY 2025,

HIGHLIGHTS:

9. The importance of ensuring that the Union's common values, including democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are safeguarded and promoted;

10. The significant progress made towards the European Education Area and the importance of reinforcing the commitment towards the ambitious further development of its goals, objectives and scope, in order to make the vision of the European Education Area a reality and to make Europe the leading learning society in the world; contributing to a culture that encourages, empowers and motivates people and societies to learn and innovate, including all levels and forms of education and training and all stages of life;

11. The importance of developing the future strategic framework for cooperation in education and training as a tool to support and implement the European Education Area, contributing to its successful implementation and ambitious further development;

12. The instrumental role of the Erasmus+ programme in delivering the European Education Area by offering wide access to learning mobility as well as reinforced strategic partnerships and policy support for more inclusive, lifelong learning-based, gender responsive and innovation driven education, training and youth policies;

13. The need to continue efforts to support and develop cooperation at European level between Member States with a view to enhancing peer and mutual learning and the exchange of best practices, whilst removing barriers to learning mobility, and to support the Member States in developing their education and training systems holistically, with the aim of contributing to the overall sustainability of those systems and ultimately increasing upward socioeconomic convergence;

14. The need to tackle and reflect on global challenges and opportunities, especially in the fields of climate change, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and misleading or false information by boosting the development of knowledge, skills and competences and critical thinking from basic skills to high-level qualifications, at all levels and forms of education and training;

INVITES THE COMMISSION, WHEN FURTHER DEVELOPING THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA AND THE FUTURE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING, IN LINE WITH ITS COMPETENCES AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

15. Recall the ambitions expressed in the Council Conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area that the area should be underpinned by the life-long learning continuum, from early childhood education and care to school and vocational education and training, to higher education and adult learning, and to continue firm action removing barriers to learning mobility, promoting and fostering mobility and cooperation in education and training, and supporting Member States in modernising their education and training systems, promoting teaching and learning of languages, mutual recognition of qualifications and outcomes of learning periods abroad;

16. Take further initiatives towards the creation of a genuine European Education Area, aiming to develop further its goals, objectives and scope and to enhance its links with the post-ET2020 strategic framework for cooperation in education and training; and to take appropriate steps to ensure that all levels and all forms of education and training are promoted on an equal basis;

17. Fully exploit the potential of the priorities of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, namely by enhancing investment in those competences that are needed to meet the demands of work and a changing society, resulting, inter alia, from climate change, globalisation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and robotisation, with a view to promoting innovation, participation in democratic societies and social inclusion;

18. Engage in common reflection on the possibilities, appropriate policy actions and deliverables that would contribute to the strategic aim of a climate-neutral and green Europe and a fair transition; and take into account the rich potential of education and training when developing European policies on Green Europe, notably through Erasmus+ and focusing on learners' active participation in Education for Sustainable Development;

19. Continue coordinated efforts to make progress on a comprehensive Digital Education Action Plan for Europe and on the Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence, by ensuring complementarity, added value and the coordination of policy aims and tools with regard to the European Education Area;

20. Building on the ET2020 cooperation toolbox, develop concrete future-oriented and innovative working methods in the field of European cooperation in education and training. Possibilities to mobilise cooperation instruments, such as international analysis, research and study visits and collaborative pilot projects, can be fully explored with an aim to innovate and test out policies and delivery tools, and to develop and promote research-based thematic scenarios and long-term forecasts on the future of work and society with a view to both European and global developments;

21. Develop new means to train and support competent, motivated and highly qualified teachers, trainers, educators and school leaders, and promote their continuous professional development and high-quality, research-based teacher education;

FURTHER INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

22. Promote the development of digital skills and competences, innovation and an entrepreneurial mindset in education and training for all learners by opening up education towards more flexible learning opportunities and enhancing the permeability of education and training pathways as well as by ensuring inclusive and innovative approaches, including the efforts of tackling inequalities;

23. Support improvements towards high-quality, inclusive, lifelong, flexible, gender-responsive and innovation-driven education and training systems;

24. Fully exploit the potential of all relevant fields of education and training with a view to deepening the European Education Area and seek to ensure a balance between and participation of all relevant levels and forms of education and training;

25. Continue the engagement towards inclusive and high quality early childhood education and care systems, foster actions to promote key competences and inclusive, high-quality education for all, further develop European cooperation on school education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning and promote excellent teaching at all levels of education, including by enhancing cross-border mobility and cooperation for teachers, the creation and development of excellence in vocational education and training and the promotion of work-based learning in all its forms;

26. Promote cooperation and sharing of evidence of the benefits of investing in education and training, as improved knowledge, data and analysis regarding the benefits of efficient public investment in education and training can help Member States to develop more inclusive, effective and responsive education and training systems, while avoiding additional administrative burdens on the Member States;

27. Promote the development of shared, appropriate tools for tracking higher education and vocational education and training graduates at national level, in line with the New Skills Agenda for Europe and the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates;

WITH A VIEW TO THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE,

RECOGNISES:

28. The development of the first European Universities as an ambitious initiative that can allow more intensive, innovative and structured cooperation between all types of higher education institutions from all regions in Europe, at all levels and across all areas of activity, from learning and teaching to research and innovation; and considers that this could be a game-changing step forward in cross-institutional cooperation by offering various inspirational visions, models and themes for interaction in favour of the future development of the European Education Area in accordance with the changing needs of society;

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

29. Seek ways to raise awareness about the European Universities and encourage different types of higher education institutions to participate, by ensuring the high quality as well as geographical and social inclusiveness of the initiative, with the aim of making the initiative a true success:

   a. by facilitating the exchange of relevant information between parties in order to boost cooperation efforts and improve the effectiveness of the approaches taken;

   b. by ensuring an adequate operational environment by making the best use of available resources and taking appropriate steps to remove possible legislative and non-legislative obstacles at national level when necessary;

   c. by taking advantage of existing and forthcoming tools and instruments to facilitate cross-border mobility and cooperation, such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the European Student Card initiative, and by fostering the implementation of agreed commitments, such as the Council Recommendation on promoting the automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad, as well as the commitments of the European Higher Education Area;

   d. by reflecting on the existing learning mobility policy framework, as well as the European quality assurance framework, to evaluate their suitability to support transformative change and strengthen higher education cooperation;

   e. by identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement based on shared information and an analysis of the progress of the initiative;

   f. by capitalising on the pilot European Universities' experiences and lessons learnt to inform policy-making and the further development of related cooperation in education and training, and by exploring the need to take forward appropriate policies for the European Universities.

ANNEX

IN ADOPTING THIS RESOLUTION, THE COUNCIL RECALLS IN PARTICULAR THE FOLLOWING POLICY BACKGROUND:

1. Council Conclusions on strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training (ET2020) (12 May 2009)

2. Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (20 December 2012)

3. Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris, 17 March 2015)

4. The Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué (15 May 2015)

5. Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) – New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (23 and 24 November 2015)

6. Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socioeconomic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016 (24 February 2016)

7. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions – A New Skills Agenda for Europe (10 June 2016)

8. Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (19 December 2016)

9. Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all (17 February 2017)

10. Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (22 May 2017)

11. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture: The European Commission's Contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg (17 November 2017)

12. Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (20 November 2017)

13. Council conclusions on a renewed European Agenda for higher education (20 November 2017)

14. Council Conclusions on school development and excellent teaching (20 November 2017)

15. Conclusions of the European Council (17 December 2017)

16. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan (17 January 2018)

17. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions on the Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme (31 January 2018)

18. Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (15 March 2018)

19. Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (22 May 2018)

20. Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension in teaching (22 May 2018)

21. Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (22 May 2018)

22. The Paris Ministerial Communiqué (25 May 2018)

23. Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods aboard (26 November 2018)

24. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence (7 December 2018)

25. Council conclusions Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030 (9 April 2019)

26. Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care systems (22 May 2019)

27. Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (22 May 2019)

28. Council conclusions on the future of a highly digitised Europe beyond 2020: 'Boosting digital and economic competitiveness across the Union and digital cohesion' (7 June 2019)

29. European Council: The New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 (20 June 2019)