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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)

(2021/C 497/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

UNDERLINES THAT:

1. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) ⁽¹⁾, hereinafter the 'Strategic framework', is the main tool at EU level for cooperation between Member States, the European Commission and third countries and stakeholders, if and as appropriate, the main goal of which is to support the further development of education and training systems in Member States and foster their European dimension.
2. Up to 2030, achieving and further developing the European Education Area is the overarching political objective of the Strategic framework.

RECALLS THAT:

3. The Council Resolution on a strategic framework invited the Commission, in line with the Treaties and with full respect for subsidiarity, to 'work with the Member States until the end of 2021, in order to agree on a suitable governance structure to coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area, reflecting also on the issues that need to be taken further to higher political discussion, without creating additional burdens for the Member States, while ensuring their ownership of the process'.
4. During its first cycle up to 2025, the Strategic framework 'should maintain all the tried and tested mutual learning arrangements of the ET 2020, such as the working groups, Directors-General formations and peer learning instruments, and maintain the involvement of other relevant governance bodies' ⁽²⁾, without creating unnecessary structures or additional burdens for the Member States.
5. The ambition of ensuring stronger alignment with the EU's overarching priorities ⁽³⁾ - by providing support for political steering at the EU level, and facilitating efficient communication of information between the political level (the Council and its relevant preparatory bodies, namely the Education Committee), informal meetings of high-level officials (High Level Group on Education and Training, and meetings of Directors-General - hereinafter 'DG meetings')

⁽¹⁾ Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1) (hereinafter 'Council Resolution on a strategic framework').

⁽²⁾ Council Resolution on a strategic framework.

⁽³⁾ A new strategic agenda for the EU 2019-2024 sets the EU's overarching priorities.

and implementation at technical level (working groups of the Strategic framework and other expert groups, including the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks - SGIB) - is at the core of the governance structure of the Strategic framework.

AIMS TO:

6. Provide orientation and guiding principles for the governance structure of the Strategic framework, with a particular focus on the actors involved and their roles, the organisational framework in which the Strategic framework's activities take place, and governance-related implementation issues. The current Council Resolution should be seen as an instrument complementing the Council Resolution on a strategic framework.

CONSIDERS, IN LINE WITH THE TREATIES AND WITH FULL RESPECT FOR SUBSIDIARITY, THAT:

7. The guiding principles for the governance structure of the Strategic framework are:
 - Ownership and inclusion: enhance Member States' and Council ownership and involvement in view of its decision-making and policy-guiding role;
 - Responsibility: provide support for high-level political steering at EU level and advise on issues to be discussed at a higher political level, namely through and with support from the informal High Level Group on Education and Training (hereinafter 'HLG'), without undermining the role and responsibilities of the Education Committee as the relevant Council preparatory body. The Council is in the lead within the governance structure of the Strategic framework;
 - Transparency, continuity and effectiveness: ensure a comprehensive and integrated organisation and stock-taking of the many streams of activities (in DG meetings, working groups of the Strategic framework, expert groups and other peer learning instruments, etc.), whilst bridging the transition from the technical to the political level and vice-versa;
 - Collaboration and cooperation: contribute to enhancing cooperation and synergies with other policy areas, with a view to supporting national reforms and achieving the European Education Area in line with other EU-level initiatives and instruments, including, but not limited to the European Higher Education Area, the European Semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Research Area, cohesion policy funds, the European Union Recovery Instrument and other Union funding programmes and mechanisms, as well as other initiatives such as those in the areas of employment, social policy, research and innovation, equality, youth, sport, culture, finance and external relations.
8. The HLG, which should have a central role in linking the technical level to the political level in the governance structure of the Strategic framework, is an informal group of high-level officials from Member States and the Commission who meet in order to identify, discuss and steer strategic and transversal issues for European cooperation in education and training in a forward-looking manner. The Council, through its relevant preparatory body, namely the Education Committee, should be regularly informed about the outcomes of HLG discussions.
9. Directors-General formations for schools (DG Schools), vocational education and training (DG VT) and higher education (DG HE) are informal groups of high-level officials from Member States and the Commission who meet to discuss issues relating to their respective education and training sectors as well as cross-cutting topics where appropriate. The Presidency can invite third countries and stakeholders, if and as appropriate, to attend these meetings.
10. Commission expert groups ⁽⁴⁾, such as working groups of the Strategic framework, the SGIB, the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training or the expert group on quality investment in education and training, are at the service of the Strategic framework with the aim of benefiting the Member States and the Commission in their work on furthering policy development at the technical level through mutual learning, technical exchanges and the identification of good practices, among others. They are composed of experts from Member States and third countries, international organisations, stakeholders and independent experts, as appropriate.

⁽⁴⁾ The Register of Commission Expert Groups.

11. Peer learning activities (PLAs) enable Member States facing similar policy challenges to work in clusters and share good practices, focus on country-specific challenges or support a particular national reform agenda with help from peer countries, stakeholder organisations and independent experts, as appropriate.
12. Joint meetings of education and training bodies with other relevant bodies at a similar level from other policy areas - such as employment, social policy, research and innovation, equality, youth, sport, culture, finance, and external relations, among others - as well as the use of EU and national financial instruments, are relevant in the context of synergies between different policy areas.

AGREES THAT:

13. The Presidency, in cooperation with partners in the Trio Presidency and the Commission, should take the lead role with regard to coordinating the work of the HLG under the Strategic framework.
14. The HLG is chaired by the Presidency. In order to ensure a smooth flow of information and given its envisaged role vis-à-vis the political level, it should meet at least twice a year, once per Presidency. If and when appropriate, third countries and/or stakeholders could be invited by the Presidency to join the HLG meetings as observers for agenda items of common interest.
15. With a view to supporting the governance and continuity of work within the Strategic framework, regular exchanges should be organised between the two preceding Presidencies, the current Presidency, the two incoming Presidencies and the Commission, and such joint exchanges should take place within an informal coordination and support group - the HLG Coordination Board.
16. The HLG Coordination Board reports to and is subject to the HLG.
17. The role of the HLG Coordination Board is to support the HLG by:
 - contributing to HLG agenda setting, with due respect to the Presidency priorities, the strategic priorities of the Strategic framework as well as possible current trends and challenges, including unforeseen events and situations, and proposing topics for discussion at HLG meetings, including any that could contribute to the preparation of policy debates in the Council;
 - informing the HLG, and if needed the Education Committee in view of timely information sharing, of progress made within the Strategic framework towards achieving the European Education Area, including through regular updates on the outcomes of DG meetings, and the work of working groups of the Strategic framework, expert groups, outcomes of peer learning and other mutual learning activities;
 - supporting the HLG with broad orientations for possible future policies and for interaction between education and training policies and other policy areas at the international, EU, national and regional levels, also by identifying external experts, researchers, international organisations and other stakeholder organisations that can provide additional expertise for the HLG discussions;
 - supporting the HLG in enhancing synergies that could bring added value between education and training and other policy areas such as employment, social policy, research and innovation, equality, youth, sport, culture, finance or external relations;
 - supporting the HLG in reflecting on the need for a possible review of the mandates of the working groups of the Strategic framework, done in co-creation by the Commission and the Member States, while respecting the Commission's prerogative in defining and reviewing these mandates;
 - supporting the work on evaluation of the governance structure in place up to 2025 in order for the HLG to feed into the Education Committee's discussions on any possible revisions to the governance structure for the post-2025 period;
 - coordinating the preparation of a policy agenda for a period of 18 months for endorsement by the HLG.

18. The HLG Coordination Board meets regularly, at least two times per Presidency. The work of the HLG Coordination Board is jointly coordinated by the Presidency and the Commission on an equal footing, also in respect to co-financing. The meetings of the HLG Coordination Board are chaired by the Presidency.
 19. If and when needed, the HLG Coordination Board could appoint from amongst participating Member States a rapporteur for a limited term, whose role could be to inform the HLG, and if needed the Education Committee in view of timely information sharing, of the progress made by the working groups of the Strategic framework and other expert groups and relevant bodies.
 20. To ensure the smooth functioning of the HLG Coordination Board, its operational tasks and working methods, including the possible appointment, tasks and duration of a term of a rapporteur, could be set out in Terms of Reference prepared by the HLG Coordination Board and endorsed by the HLG.
 21. This Resolution shall take effect on the day of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union* and shall be reviewed as appropriate, as a result of the mid-term review of the Strategic framework to be carried out by the Council in 2025, taking into account the relevant Commission reports envisaged in the Council Resolution on a strategic framework, in order to adapt it to possible new developments and needs.
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