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PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture

**The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg,
17 November 2017**

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"Education and culture are the key to the future – both for the individual as well as for our Union as a whole. It is how we turn circumstance into opportunity, how we turn mirrors into windows and how we give roots to what it means to be 'European', in all its diversity. When Europe's Leaders meet in Gothenburg this week, we must seize the opportunity and make sure education and culture are the drivers for job creation, economic growth, social fairness and ultimately unity".

(President Juncker, 14 November 2017)

"The EU is not perfect but it is the best instrument we have for addressing the new challenges we are facing. We need the EU not only to guarantee peace and democracy but also the security of our people. We need the EU to serve better their needs and wishes to live, study, work, move and prosper freely across our continent and benefit from the rich European cultural heritage."

(Bratislava Declaration, 16 September 2016)

"We want a Union where citizens have new opportunities for cultural and social development and economic growth. [...] [We] pledge to work towards [...] a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity."

(Rome Declaration, 25 March 2017)

The debate about the future of Europe is in full swing. The European Commission launched this debate in March 2017 with its White Paper¹. President Juncker set out his views for **a more united, stronger and more democratic Union** in his 2017 State of the Union Address² and presented a clear roadmap leading up to the meeting of Leaders in Sibiu, in the meantime called by President Tusk for 9 May 2019, where further decisions on the future of Europe, prepared by the discussions as set out in the Leaders' Agenda³, should take place.

One of the key issues for debate and decision concerns the **social dimension of Europe**. The Commission presented a specific Reflection Paper⁴ that points to Europe's important achievements in this area. Europe has the most equal and inclusive societies in the world, with high life expectancy (80.7 years on average) and strong social protection systems, which helped weather the economic crisis. Unemployment rates are falling (reaching 7.5% in September 2017, which is the lowest rate recorded since November 2008) but they differ substantially from one country to the other and 18.4 million people are still unemployed,

¹ COM(2017)2025

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/state-union-2017_en

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/talinn-leaders-agenda/>

⁴ COM(2017)206

including 3.7 million young people. At the same time, 40% of European employers report that they have difficulties in finding people with the skills they need to grow and innovate.

The reflection about the future of our Union also entails a reflection on the **strength of our common identity**. When our European values and democracies are tested by awakening populist forces at home and abroad or by the spreading of "fake news" and the manipulation of our information networks, it is the moment when European Leaders and the EU institutions must react. They decided in Rome in March 2017 to keep the EU as a unique project where, following the motto of "**unity in diversity**", the EU and its Member States have been able to draw on the unique strengths and richness of their nations to achieve unprecedented progress. Sixty years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, strengthening our European identity remains essential and education and culture are the best vectors to ensure this.

This is why European leaders have decided to meet on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg to discuss the future role of education and culture in strengthening the sense of belonging together and being part of a cultural community.

The present Communication forms the European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting. It identifies key issues and sets out possible ways forward **in line with the principle of subsidiarity** and the fact that the competences for education and culture lay primarily with Member States at national, regional and local level. The Union's competences are limited to encouraging cooperation, supporting and complementing national actions. The Union's action also foresees the possibility to finance programmes (Erasmus for education and Media for culture being the most long-standing ones and the most popular).

This Communication sets out the vision of a **European Education Area**, building on the New Skills Agenda for Europe⁵ and the investing in Europe's youth initiatives⁶. Education is part of the solution to get more people into decent jobs, respond better to the economy's skills needs and strengthen Europe's **resilience** in a context of the rapid and profound changes induced by the technological revolution and globalisation. This last aspect was addressed in the Commission's **Reflection Paper on harnessing globalisation**⁷, which pointed to the key role of social and education policies in ensuring resilience, innovation and competitiveness. Europe does not excel in delivering high-quality skills, as even the best-performing Member States are outperformed by advanced Asian countries. Europe has, however, the ambition to grasp all opportunities created by new developments.

It is therefore in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience **European identity in all its diversity**.

⁵ COM(2016)381

⁶ COM(2016)940: Investing in Europe's youth; COM(2016)941: Improving and Modernising Education; COM(2017)248: School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life; COM(2017)247: A renewed EU agenda for higher education.

⁷ COM(2017)240

1. Towards an ambitious shared European Agenda on education and culture

Europe is facing a number of key developments:

- continued digitisation, automation, artificial intelligence and the need to keep up with technological progress;
- the future of work, its impact on working conditions and future needs for skills and competences;
- the modernisation of European welfare states, social inclusion and the need to share the benefits of growth and reduce inequalities, including gender inequality;
- demographic trends, an ageing workforce, and the need to integrate a culturally diverse migrant population;
- new patterns in communication, social media, the phenomenon of "fake" news and the need to promote media literacy among all citizens; as well as
- a flaring-up of populism and xenophobia, the risk of violent radicalisation and the need to strengthen the sense of belonging together.

Education and culture can and should be part of the solution to tackle many of these challenges and offer ways to harness the opportunities that come with them:

- Education forms the basis for a creative and productive workforce that drives R&D and innovation and is able to steer technological and digital developments, rather than react to them; education and training equip people with the skills they need on the labour market and enable them to respond to changing circumstances and structural change or disruption; education, training, re- and up-skilling help to smoothen the transition between jobs; education and training give people the chance to create jobs themselves; a highly-qualified and flexible workforce forms the backbone of a **resilient economy** that deals with shocks well and plays a pro-active role in the global economy.
- Education and training are also the best way to increase employability and help get people into decent jobs. They offer the best protection against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Provided that it is of good quality and inclusive, education from childhood on lays the groundwork for **social cohesion**, social mobility and an equitable society.
- At the same time, education and culture help make Europe an attractive place to live, study and work, marked by freedom and common values, which are reflected in fundamental rights and an open society. Education forms the basis for **active citizenship** and helps prevent populism, xenophobia and violent radicalisation.
- Europe's cultural diversity is a strength that fuels creativity and innovation and, at the same time, there is common ground that makes up the distinct feature of the European way of life. Education and culture play a pivotal role for people to (i) know better each other across borders, and (ii) experience and be aware of what it means to be "European". Understanding and preserving our cultural heritage and diversity are pre-requisites to maintain our cultural community, our common values and **identity**.

2. Boosting mobility and facilitating cross-border cooperation

People in Europe study, work, travel and share ideas freely. The European project has always been about overcoming borders and allowing for free movement. Today, the internal market is a reality for goods but not for education and culture. On the other hand, we see an increasing interest in cross-border cooperation and mobility for both learners and cultural and creative works in all Member States, with interest coming from the education and cultural communities themselves.

One identified obstacle to the mobility of students is the fact that, despite the Bologna process⁸ and other cooperation frameworks within the Council of Europe, higher education **school diplomas** are not readily recognised in other Member States, which means that young people are hindered, for no good reason, from taking up studies or work in another country. This is a lost opportunity in equipping young people with a good education and a hindrance to the flow of ideas, which impedes the work of universities, research and innovation. It is also a remaining obstacle to a truly integrated European labour market.

There are many administrative and bureaucratic obstacles that hinder **universities**, higher education institutions and training providers from working seamlessly across borders. In addition, study and training programmes that lead to qualifications that are automatically recognised in more than one country are still the exception. This makes life more difficult for graduates and it impedes universities, which have to deal with administrative issues rather than focussing on excellence.

According to international rankings, out of the 50 best universities in the world, only 10 are located in the EU. It is important that Europe remains an attractive place to study and that, in the future more European universities top the international rankings. To support the excellence of our higher education institutions and to develop our sense of belonging to the EU, the EU budget funds a small number of European higher education institutions that deliver education on European issues: the European University Institute in Florence, the College of Europe (Bruges and Natolin), the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht, the Academy of European Law in Trier and the 'Centre International de Formation Européenne' in Nice. For the same reasons, EU institutions and Member States should support the establishment of the School of European and Transnational Governance in Florence, which would train managers from national administrations, the private sector and civil society in EU affairs. The EU also supports the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), which helps creative minds to develop new ideas and entrepreneurial projects.

The EU already has an excellent track record of **actively promoting mobility**, starting with university students but also including secondary level pupils, vocational students and young professionals as well as teachers, thanks to the Erasmus+ programme. Most recently, the Commission launched the European Solidarity Corps, which offers new opportunities for volunteering, traineeships and jobs for EU young people between the ages of 18 and 30. In

⁸ Initiated in 1999, the Bologna Process is an intergovernmental process which facilitates the mutual recognition of diplomas in higher education across 48 countries.

2017, the project Move2Learn Learn2Move has given the chance to young Europeans to discover and learn about Europe.

The most prominent example of EU action to boost mobility is the different generations of **Erasmus+**⁹, one of the most popular European programmes. After 30 years in operation, the Erasmus+ programme has helped 9 million people to study, train, teach, or volunteer in another country. People speak about an "Erasmus generation". Evidence shows that people who have taken part in Erasmus have excellent chances on the labour market. In times of globalisation, such experiences are bound to become even more valuable. However, it is still the case today that **only 3.7% of young people have the chance to take part in this type of mobility**. It is also true that mobility outside these well-established frameworks remains difficult for the reasons explained above.

If European Leaders and their citizens call for an open Europe in which learning mobility is the norm and if Europe wants to remain a continent of excellence, an attractive place to study, to carry out research and to work, the time has come to work towards a **European Education Area**. Although the Union's competences in education and culture clearly do not allow for harmonisation as in other fields, action at EU level based on cooperation is possible and desirable.

The way forward (for the ideas put forward below that entail access to EU funding beyond 2020, final decisions will only be taken in the context of the future discussions on EU finances and the multiannual financial framework for the next period):

- as an essential element of the European Education Area, prepare a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on the mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas/study periods abroad**. This could be accompanied by a new process, building on experiences from existing cooperation schemes, to facilitate such recognition and take further the cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning certificates ("the **Sorbonne process**");
- boost the tried-and-tested **Erasmus+ programme** in all categories of learners that it already covers (pupils, students, trainees, apprentices and teachers) with the aim of doubling the number of participants and reaching out to learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2025;
- roll-out in 2019 the pilot project for an **EU student card**, with the objective of offering it to all mobile students by 2025, to facilitate student mobility across borders and offer a new user-friendly way to store information on a person's academic records;
- work towards truly **European universities**, which are enabled to network and cooperate seamlessly across borders and compete internationally, including the creation of a School of European and Transnational Governance (hosted by the European University Institute in Florence, Italy).

⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/>

3. Investing in people and their education

Investing in education is a **shared interest** of all Member States and of Europe as a whole as it is a driver for jobs, economic growth and improved welfare and supports upward economic and social convergence both between and within Member States. Investment in initial education and training and in upskilling throughout life pays dividends, both to the individual and to the public purse. Education does not only help to achieve economic and social objectives. It is also a right as set out in Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, even though the scope of this right is limited to the action of the EU institutions and bodies and applies to the Member States only when they are implementing EU law.

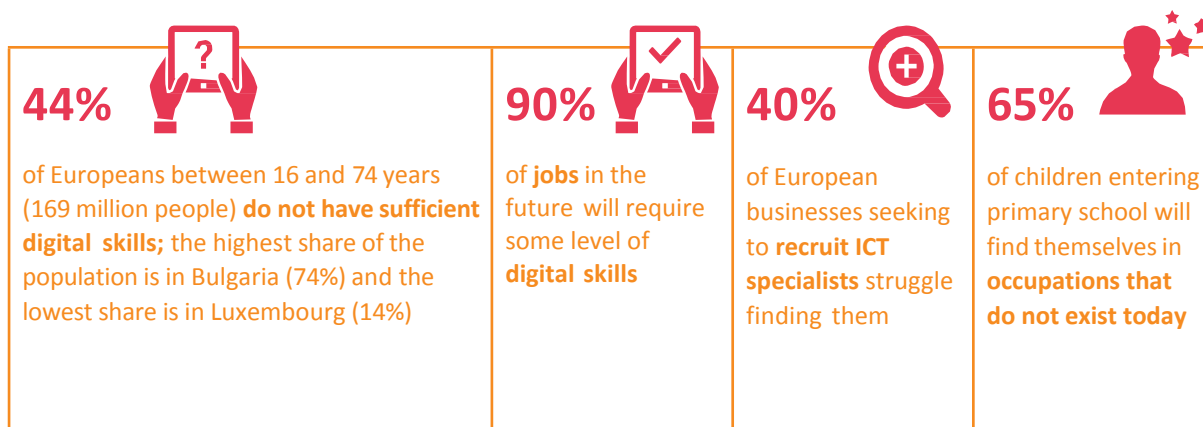
Education and training systems in Europe are in general of good quality but there are also short-comings: too many pupils acquire only a low level of competences. Recently, the share of "**low achievers**" in the subject of "science" surged by 25%. The share of pupils with low achievements in mathematics has been stagnating for years at around 20%. These young people will encounter serious problems on the labour market. 20% of the EU working age population have low literacy and low numeracy skills. 44% of the EU population have low digital competences. As skills demand continues to rise, this problem will not go away.

The latest OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data show that **one in five pupils** in the EU has **insufficient proficiency in reading, mathematics and science**. Between 2012 and 2015, the trend in underachievement for the EU as a whole has worsened. In the countries involved in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012, between 5% and 28% of adults are proficient at only the lowest levels in literacy and 8% to 32% are proficient at only the lowest levels in numeracy.



A second problem is linked to **equal opportunities**. Pupils showing weak performance come disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. from households with low levels of income or education). This shows that, in practice, education often does not offer a real chance for social mobility. Quality in education does not only mean achieving good results, but also ensuring that *all* pupils get the support they need for them to achieve good results.

Another key aspect to ensure quality education is to make sure that the education systems, including vocational ones, impart all the knowledge, skills and competences that are deemed essential in today's world. As skills needs are changing rapidly, work-based learning, as apprenticeships or in a larger context of life-long learning, is essential and businesses have an important role to play through education-industry partnerships. To reap the benefits of technological developments, existing short-comings concerning teaching digital skills such as coding or cyber security skills, media literacy and entrepreneurship skills must be addressed. Furthermore, social, civic and 'learning to learn' skills are essential for young people to participate fully in diverse and quickly changing societies. More efforts are needed to strive for curricula that are comprehensive and include all of these "**key competences**".



A specific issue is the learning of **languages**. The European integration process calls for acquiring good language competences. Multilingualism represents one of the greatest assets in terms of cultural diversity in Europe and, at the same time, one of the most substantial challenges. Almost half of EU citizens only speak and understand their mother tongue. At the same time, the broad majority of Member States¹⁰ make the learning of two foreign languages compulsory for all students in general education at some point during their schooling.

An additional problem is that few students choose to study **science, technology, engineering and mathematics**, especially girls. Linked to this, there are not enough opportunities for students to follow inter-disciplinary approaches and too few students combine science and technology with arts. This raises the risk of labour and skills shortages, which can hold back innovation and competitiveness.

The way forward:

- prepare a Council **Recommendation on improving language learning** in Europe, setting out a benchmark that by 2025 all young Europeans finishing upper secondary education have a good knowledge of two languages in addition to their mother tongue(s);
- in the context of revamping the existing EU level cooperation, make the Council **benchmarks** for the share of low achievers and early school-leavers more ambitious by 2025, reducing the first benchmark from 15% currently to 10% and the second from 10% currently to 5 %. New benchmarks could be agreed for **digital competences and entrepreneurship**;
- **update the Recommendation** on Key Competences in early 2018.

Three key factors contribute to an improved education: the first one is the quality of **teachers and of teaching**. Teachers play the central role in the process of imparting skills, competences and knowledge as well as in fostering international perspectives early in a young person's life. The better the teacher, the better the outcome. However, many teachers will retire in the years to come, and it is essential to attract enough qualified and motivated people

¹⁰ Belgium (French community), Germany, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Hungary and the United Kingdom are countries in which learning two languages is an option rather than an obligation.

to this profession. This would require offering them excellent training and attractive perspectives for their professional development and remuneration.

The second issue is linked to **lifelong learning**. While young people spend the bulk of their time in education, investment in competences drops after graduation and remains flat for most people for the rest of their lives. Lifelong learning offers a way for re-skilling and up-skilling, but only a small fraction of adults take part in such activities, and most of them are well-qualified already. Most low skilled adults, including those who struggle with basic skills or who are in precarious or fragmented work situations, do not take part in lifelong learning. Today, the disparities between EU countries in terms of participation in lifelong learning are significant. It is essential to seek convergence and increase the share of people engaging in learning throughout their lives. This would be a promising way to improve skills and knowledge capital in Europe. Two generations ago, having access to basic education was the key to security – in today's fast changing world, this role has been taken over by life-long learning.

At the same time, there is evidence that good education during early childhood lays a solid foundation for learning at school and throughout life but, in practice, there are shortcomings with regard to the access, quality and affordability of such education.

The third factor is **innovation and digital technologies in education**. They offer new possibilities for teaching and learning approaches but Europe is lagging behind in making use of them. Too many schools do not yet have access to high-speed connectivity and digital equipment, and not enough teachers benefit from professional development programmes in these fields.

The way forward (for the ideas put forward below that entail access to EU funding beyond 2020, final decisions will only be taken in the context of the future discussions on EU finances and the multiannual financial framework for the next period):

- gear up support for teachers by increasing their mobility across Europe and through the "**eTwinning network**", aiming to reach 600,000 users by 2020, by providing Massive Open On-line Courses as part of setting up an **EU Teacher Academy**;
- create momentum to stimulate lifelong learning by setting a more ambitious **benchmark for participation in lifelong learning** activities to 25% by 2025;
- prepare a Council **Recommendation on a quality framework for Early Childhood Education and Care**, accompanied by a more ambitious **common benchmark** that would call for offering places for at least 95% of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school age;
- prepare a new **Digital Education Action Plan** in order to **promote innovative, personalised and digital teaching methods** and technologies that will help improve learning outcomes; implement a **new EU connectivity target** with the aim of ensuring that all schools have access to ultra-fast broadband by 2025.

4. Strengthening the sense of European Identity and awareness of cultural heritage

Freedom, democracy, equality, respect for the rule of law, human rights and dignity are the fundamental values on which the European Union is based. They form part of our European identity. **Education, culture and sport have a pivotal role in promoting active citizenship and common values** amongst the youngest generations. Their combination in concrete projects in local communities contributes to the strengthening of the sense of European identity. Initiatives such as the European day at school¹¹ should receive renewed support and be developed on a larger scale.

The EU is pursuing various activities to safeguard and enhance Europe's cultural heritage and offers support to cultural and creative sectors. It also provides a regulatory framework aimed at improving the conditions for authors and creators to create, distribute and get remunerated in the digital world.

While it is hard to measure achievements in terms of culture or identity, cultural activities contribute to improving people's experience, to knowing each other better and to understand what it means to be European. In that regard, the well-established initiative of **European Capitals of Culture**¹² has been celebrating and promoting cultural diversity for 30 years. At the same time, the economic importance of cultural industries must not be underestimated. European cultural and creative sectors represent around 4% of European GDP and provide jobs to 8 million Europeans.

The **2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage**¹³ will be an opportunity to increase awareness of the importance of culture and cultural heritage and, in particular, to recall that cultural heritage *belongs to all*. It will also be the moment to highlight the strong economic role that cultural heritage plays. It will provide an occasion to show how digital tools can broaden access to cultural material and opportunities, and shed light to initiatives such as **Europeana**¹⁴, which fosters access to cultural heritage material held by libraries, archives and museums through digital means.

The **Creative Europe programme**¹⁵ supports the circulation of culture projects across borders, the mobility of artists and the wide distribution of European films. Its "Creative and Cultural Sectors Guarantee Facility" aims at increasing access to finance for small and medium-sized companies active in the Cultural and Creative Sector, and developing activities based on cultural values and/or artistic and other creative expressions. The Guarantee Facility has been in operation since 30 June 2016 and has a budget of EUR 121.4 million for the 2016-2020 period. So far, there is a growing market take-up, with guarantee agreements already signed in Spain, France and Romania and another four agreements in preparation in Belgium,

¹¹ The European day at school is a good example of how students can get in contact with Europe. Since 2007, the project launched by Chancellor Merkel, at the occasion of the German Presidency of the Council, offers students in Germany the opportunity to get to know Europe better. Politicians from all political levels, as well as officials from the European institutions are invited to visit schools and discuss Europe.

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/culture/european-year-cultural-heritage-2018_en

¹⁴ <https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en>

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/>

Italy and the Czech Republic. The MEDIA programme has, since 1991, invested over EUR 2.5 billion in the creation of European films and audio-visual products, supporting their production, their promotion and their distribution across borders.

In view of the growing challenges to qualitative journalism and factual reporting by the phenomena of "fake news" and "alternative facts", we need to take a stronger stance in support of media freedom, media pluralism and media transparency in Europe. Even though Europe has no direct competence over the media, the EU has for years a close link with **Euronews**. In 1993, Euronews was created by a number of national Europeans public broadcasters, with the ambition of having a European public broadcaster offering access to independent, high-quality information with a pan-European perspective. At the time, the project was meant to contribute to the strengthening of European identity. For that reason, without becoming a shareholder, the EU has been providing financial support to the channel, supporting the broadcast of programmes in nine EU languages, but also of services in Arabic and Farsi. EU funding today represents 36% of the Euronews budget (EUR 25 million a year).

However, over the years, European national public broadcasters have become minority shareholders, while non-EU private broadcasters and private investors from third countries have increased their share. There are increasing concerns whether a channel that gives viewers the impression of being a kind of a European public broadcaster is always reflecting the diversity of opinions as they exist in Europe and European values. This is why we need a reflection and a decision at the political level on the degree of ambition the EU has for the future of Euronews. The European Parliament should be closely involved in this process.

The way forward (for the ideas put forward below that entail access to EU funding beyond 2020, final decisions will only be taken in the context of the future discussions on EU finances and the multiannual financial framework for the next period):

- prepare a **Council Recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching**;
- strengthen the financing capacity of the **Creative and Cultural Sectors Guarantee Facility** by 2020 in order to allow banks and other financial institutions from an enlarged number of countries significantly to increase financing of small and medium-sized companies in the cultural and creative sectors;
- launch by 2020 a **#Digital4Culture strategy** with the purpose of coupling culture and digital and using the digital potential to enhance the positive economic and societal effects of culture;
- revamp and strengthen the **European Agenda for Culture** by 2025, based on the cultural mainstreaming principle of the Treaty, to promote the cultural dimension of the Union, with particular emphasis on a European identity through culture and values;
- strengthen the European dimension of **Euronews**.

5. Conclusions and outlook

Europe is a cultural community, based on shared values and successful economic integration, in particular the internal market. The European Union's social market economy is a hallmark of the European way of life, combining economic freedom with social principles, as reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Education and culture are primarily policies in the hands of Member States and of their regional and local authorities. The European level is playing an important complementary role, in particular, when it comes to cross-border activities (the most prominent examples of EU action being the Erasmus+ and the Media programme). It is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the potential of education and culture in full. A collective effort would enable Europe as a whole to deal better with the challenges it is facing.

A **vision for 2025** would be a Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders. A continent, where spending time in another Member State – to study, to learn, or to work – has become the standard and where, in addition to one's mother tongue, speaking two other languages has become the norm. A continent in which people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity.

Delivering on this vision must be a common endeavour. It will mean working together towards a **shared agenda**, in full respect of subsidiarity.

At the heart of this shared agenda is the idea to work jointly towards a **European Education Area** based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth, to be established by 2025, including via:

- making learning mobility a reality for all;
- removing obstacles to the recognition of qualifications, both at the level of schools and higher education;
- modernising the development of curricula;
- boosting language learning;
- creating world-class European universities that can work seamlessly together across borders;
- improving education, training and lifelong learning;
- driving innovation in education in the digital era;
- giving more support to teachers;
- and preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of a European identity and culture.

Investing in people does not come for free. For this ambitious shared agenda to be credible, the European Union will have to engage in commensurate people-based investment. Supporting young people to gain experience in another Member State will require substantial funding. The political ambition would need to be aligned with the means to act and will therefore need to be reflected in the future discussions on EU finances.

Other elements will not require new funding but an investment in cooperation, for example, by streamlining provisions on recognition or removing legal obstacles that hinder cross-border mobility and cooperation.

Member States already invest, on average, almost 5% of GDP in their education systems. However, there are important differences between Member States, with some spending around 4% or less (Romania) while others spending up to 7% (Denmark). Working towards upward convergence **to make Europe a continent of excellence** will require improved investments in education in some Member States, closing the gap to the EU average.

EU level investment in education and training complements national efforts. This applies to a variety of instruments, ranging from mobility programmes (in particular Erasmus+), research and innovation programmes (Horizon 2020, in particular Marie Skłodowska Curie), European Structural and Investment Funds, financial instruments (including the Investment Plan for Europe which already funds education related projects in Finland, Portugal and Latvia) and the Structural Reform Support Service. Education is primarily funded through public expenditure. However, in the context of tight public finances, both at national and EU levels, the potential of using innovative forms of funding, for example tapping into private investment and using investment tools such as the European Fund for Strategic Investments, would also need to be explored for some types of education equipment (e.g. to provide high connectivity in schools) and certain forms of education (e.g. to promote higher education cooperation).

This shared agenda would be implemented on the basis of the existing distribution of tasks and competences, using tried-and-tested ways of working together. In particular, the **European Semester** would play a key role in supporting structural reforms to improve education policy outcomes and bring about **upward convergence**. A priority would be to offer to everybody access to high-quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, in line with principle no 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The existing **EU-level cooperation in the field of education and training**, with its focus on exchanging experiences, mutual learning and providing national policy-makers with evidence on best practices on what works well in education, would be relaunched with a 2025 perspective in the light of the new priorities and the **ambition to build up a European Education Area**. In particular, it would support the launch of a process (“the *Sorbonne process*”) that, politically and technically, will accompany the work on removing obstacles for recognition of school leaving and higher education diplomas, and work towards the smoother cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning certificates.

As President Juncker said on 1 March 2017 when presenting the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe: *"the European Union has changed our lives for the better. We must ensure it keeps going doing so for all of those that will follow us"*. Putting education and culture at the heart of our reflection on how to strengthen our shared European identity, and putting forward concrete ideas and initiatives to achieve this goal, are the best way to sustain the **diversity and richness of our Union**.

At their meeting on Education and Culture in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017, Leaders are invited to discuss and give a strategic orientation on the following **six key policy suggestions** from the European Commission (without prejudice to the decision on the next multiannual financial framework):

- 1) boost the **Erasmus+ programme** in all categories of learners that it already covers (pupils, students, trainees, apprentices and teachers) with the aim of doubling the number of participants and reaching out to learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2025;
- 2) work on a **Council Recommendation on improving language learning in Europe**, setting out a benchmark that, by 2025, all young Europeans finishing upper secondary education have a good knowledge of two languages, in addition to their mother tongue(s);
- 3) work on a **Council Recommendation on the mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas/study periods abroad**. This could be accompanied by a new process, building on experiences from existing cooperation schemes to facilitate such recognition and take further the cross-border validation of training and lifelong learning certificates ("the Sorbonne process");
- 4) strengthen the financing capacity of the **Creative and Cultural Sectors Guarantee Facility** by 2020 in order to allow banks and other financial institutions from an enlarged number of countries significantly to increase financing of small and medium-sized companies in the cultural and creative sectors;
- 5) work towards truly European universities that are enabled to network and cooperate seamlessly across borders and compete internationally, including the **creation of a School of European and Transnational Governance** (hosted by the European University Institute in Florence, Italy);
- 6) strengthen the European dimension of **Euronews**.