



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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PRESS RELEASE

3144th Council meeting

Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

Brussels, 10 February 2012

President **Ms Christine ANTORINI**
Minister for Children and Education of Denmark

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 8847 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026
press.office@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/Newsroom>

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Main results of the Council

The Council adopted the 2012 joint report on the implementation of the “Strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training (“ET 2020”), together with the priorities for the next work cycle (2012-2014).

In public deliberation, the Council held a policy debate on the contribution of education and training to reducing youth unemployment, in the context of the European Semester and the 2012 Annual Growth Survey.

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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>).
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PARTICIPANTS

Belgium:

Mr Olivier BELLE

Deputy Permanent Representative

Bulgaria:

Ms Petya EVTIMOVA

Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Science

Czech Republic:

Mr Josef DOBEŠ

Minister for Education

Denmark:

Ms Christine ANTORINI

Mr Jesper FISKER

Minister for Children and Education

State Secretary for the Ministry for Children and Education

Germany:

Mr Helge BRAUN

Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Education and Research

Estonia:

Mr Gert ANTSU

Deputy Permanent Representative

Ireland:

Mr Ruairí QUINN

Minister for Education and Skills

Greece:

Mr Andreas PAPASTAVROU

Deputy Permanent Representative

Spain:

Mr José Ignacio WERT ORTEGA

Minister for Education, Culture and Sport

France:

Mr Philippe LEGLISE-COSTA

Deputy Permanent Representative

Italy:

Mr Vincenzo GRASSI

Deputy Permanent Representative

Cyprus:

Mr Giorgos DEMOSTHENOUS

Minister for Education and Culture

Latvia:

Mr Juris ŠTĀLMEISTARS

Deputy Permanent Representative

Lithuania:

Mr Gintaras STEPONAVIČIUS

Minister for Education and Science

Luxembourg:

Ms Michèle EISENBARTH

Deputy Permanent Representative

Hungary:

Mr András JÁVOR

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Resources

Malta:

Mr Chris SAID

Minister for Justice, Dialogue and the Family

Netherlands:

Mr Dirk OLDENBURG

Deputy Permanent Representative

Austria:

Mr Harald GÜNTHER

Deputy Permanent Representative

Poland:

Ms Krystyna SZUMILAS

Minister for National Education

Portugal:

Mr Pedro COSTA PEREIRA

Deputy Permanent Representative

Romania:

Mr Cristian BADESCU

Deputy Permanent Representative

Slovenia:

Mr Uroš VAJGL

Deputy Permanent Representative

Slovakia:

Mr Eugen JURZYCA

Minister for Education, Science, Research and Sport

Finland:

Mr Jukka GUSTAFSSON

Minister for Education and Science

Sweden:

Mr Jan OLSSON

Deputy Permanent Representative

United Kingdom:

Mr Andy LEBRECHT

Deputy Permanent Representative

.....
Commission:

Ms Androulla VASSILIOU

Member

.....
The Government of the Acceding State was represented as follows:

CROATIA

Mr Željko JOVANOVIĆ

Minister of Science, Education and Sports

ITEMS DEBATED**JOINT REPORT ON EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The Council adopted the 2012 joint report on the implementation of the "Strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training ("ET 2020")¹, ([5600/12](#)). The report assesses actions and developments during the first cycle of implementing "ET 2020" (2009-2011) and establishes priorities for European policy cooperation during the next cycle (2012-14), which are aimed to a large extent at mobilising education and training in support of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The joint report presents a mixed picture of progress, with some positive indications but much still needs to be done to improve Europe's skills base, further reduce rates of early school-leaving and improve the employability of those leaving the education and training system. The report stresses the importance of investing effectively in education and training reforms to support sustainable growth and generate jobs and underlines the need for a real follow-through by member states on EU level policy guidance.

Commissioner Vassiliou emphasised that education and training were part of the solution to recovery from the current financial crisis in Europe and called on the Member States to step up their efforts to achieve the EU headline targets on early school leaving and higher education attainment, as well as to reach the aims of the "ET2020" framework in general. She also referred to the valuable information on education and training systems available through the EURYDICE network and its recent on-line tool Eurypedia (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en)

Two member states (NL and SE) indicated that they would have preferred a shorter list of priorities for the next cycle, which would make their implementation more efficient and give sharper focus to the whole "ET2020" process.

¹ OJ 119, 28.5.2009.

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY - EDUCATION AND TRAINING'S CONTRIBUTION TO REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Ministers discussed the education aspects of the 2012 Annual Growth Survey and the Euro Plus Pact, focusing on the education and training sector's response to the current high rate of youth unemployment in many Member States and, in particular, on how to ensure a smoother transition from education to work¹. Today, an average of more than 20 % of 15-24 year olds in the EU (*i.e.*, over 5 million young people) are unemployed. In some countries, this figure is closer to 50 %.

Ministers were therefore invited to indicate which policy initiative in the field of education and training should be taken in 2012, at national or European level, in order to contribute to tackling this problem and alleviating the social consequences of the crisis for young people.

Commissioner Vassiliou pointed out that the current high rate of youth unemployment in Europe - coupled with a 14% rate of early school leavers and 30% of low achievers - is not only due to the financial crisis but also indicates that there are weaknesses in the European education systems that require a critical review and a perhaps a new approach. She considered that the problem of youth unemployment called for both immediate action and a longer-term preventive approach.

She also highlighted the recent Commission's initiative (announced at the informal European Council meeting on 30 January), which will provide specific help to the eight member states with the highest rates of youth unemployment ("action teams"). Commissioner Vassiliou also recommended that member states make the best use of European tools, such as the Leonardo strand of the current Lifelong Learning Programme and the future Erasmus for All Programme, as well as of the Structural Funds.

The debate was initiated by four "lead speakers" from Member States with particularly relevant national initiatives to present:

- Mr George DEMOSTHENOUS from Cyprus, on educational priority zones;
- Dr Helge BRAUN from Germany, on vocational education and training;
- Mr Ruairi QUINN from Ireland, on higher education;
- Mr Eugen JURZYCA from Slovakia, on asymmetry in education;

¹ See also: Commission communication: 'Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe' ([18577/11](#)).

It was generally agreed that although there was no single response to youth unemployment and any solution required a combination of policies involving several different sectors, education and training systems had to be modernised in order to improve their quality and efficiency and ensure that they equipped young people with the right skills and competences for the labour market. Stronger cooperation between education and training providers, social partners and other relevant parties should be promoted to support a smoother transition from education to work.

To achieve this, most ministers were of the opinion that the practical dimension of curricula and course work should be enhanced in order to avoid a skills mismatch, and that opportunities for pupils and students to acquire "hands-on" experience should be increased, in particular by promoting quality apprenticeships and traineeships and making vocational education and training more attractive. A large number of member states had already established different types of strategies to deal with these problems, and several of them had had successful experiences with dual vocational education and training systems which combine education with direct work experience in companies.

Several ministers added that better recognition of skills and competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal education and learning should also be promoted, as these could also enhance employability.

Finally, many Member States emphasised the urgent need mobilise the resources available under EU funds and programmes, in order to help more young people get into work or training and enhance their mobility.

The Presidency will forward a summary of the debate as the education sector's contribution to the Spring European Council meeting scheduled for 1-2 March 2012.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Restrictive measures against Belarus

The Council adopted a regulation implementing changes to the EU sanctions regime against Belarus, which the Council decided on 23 January 2012. Those amendments broaden the criteria for imposing admission restrictions and asset freezes. Accordingly, such sanctions can be applied to persons responsible for serious violations of human rights or the repression of civil society and democratic opposition, and to persons and entities benefiting from or supporting the Lukashenka regime.

Restrictive measures - Côte d'Ivoire

The Council amended the list of persons and entities subject to restrictive measures in view of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Given the developments in that country, the Council lifted restrictive measures on 30 individuals.

Relations with Tajikistan

The Council approved the EU position for the second meeting of the EU-Tajikistan cooperation Council, to be held in Brussels on 27 February 2012. Talks will focus on the implementation of the EU strategy for Central Asia, political matters, including internal reforms, human rights and the rule of law, water and environment as well as international issues and regional cooperation.

Budget orientations for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

The Council took note of orientations for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) budgets in 2012 and in 2013. The Union budget for 2012 provides for EUR 362.46 million for the CFSP. Over the last years, civilian crisis management missions have consumed 85-90% of the budget. This trend is expected to continue in the future.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Derogation from the VAT directive for Spain and France - Electricity interconnection

The Council adopted a decision authorising Spain and France to introduce a measure derogating from directive 2006/112/EC on the EU system of value-added taxation (VAT) for the construction of an underground interconnection between their respective electricity networks ([5268/12](#)).

In order to simplify the collection of VAT on the supply of goods and services for the construction between Santa Llogaia in Spain and Baixas in France, the interconnection will be considered as being 50% in either country.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Visa Code

The Council adopted a regulation ([75/11](#)) amending certain provisions of the Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), which was established by regulation 810/2009¹ and became applicable in April 2010.

The purpose of this technical amendment is to clarify the existing text in order to establish legal certainty and a harmonised application of the rules, which will be beneficial not only to individual travellers but also to airline companies.

Schengen evaluation - Presidency Interim Report

The Council took note of the most recent presidency interim report concerning the implementation of Schengen evaluations. The report provides an overview of progress and achievements over the past six months, including an up to date picture of the state of play of member states' evaluations.

¹ OJ L 243 of 15.9.09.

Regarding first mandate evaluations (for countries wishing to join the Schengen area), the Polish presidency managed to successfully conclude the evaluation process for Liechtenstein. The Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted on 13 December 2011 conclusions and a decision allowing Liechtenstein to accede to the Schengen area on 19 December 2011. Concerning Bulgaria and Romania, the evaluation process was already finalized under the previous Hungarian presidency. A positive decision by the Justice and Home Affairs Council has, however, not yet been taken.

A dozen second mandate evaluations (for countries already part of the Schengen area) continued in the various areas of evaluation (SIS, police cooperation, visa-issuance, data protection, land, air and sea borders).

In an effort to make evaluation reports and the follow-up process more effective and thus contribute to the common effort of strengthening the evaluation process, the Schengen Matters working party (Schengen evaluation) also agreed to revise the mission reports and follow-up based on the feedback obtained from the member states. The improvements will be implemented as of 2012.

INTERNAL MARKET

Restriction of phosphates in household detergents

The Council adopted a regulation restricting the use of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds in consumer laundry and automatic dishwasher detergents in order to reduce the level of phosphorus poured into the waters and thus diminish eutrophication ([67/11](#) and [5752/12 ADD1](#)).

For more information see press release [6310/12](#).

Update of the list of defence-related products

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a directive updating the list of defence-related products contained in directive 2009/43/EC ([17543/11](#)).

Directive 2009/43/EC simplifying terms and conditions of transfers of defence-related products within the EU provides that the Commission shall update the list of defence-related products so that it corresponds to the EU's common military list, which was last updated in February 2011¹.

¹ [Official Journal C 86 of 18.3.2011, p. 1.](#)

Directive 2009/43/EC seeks to contribute to the development of a single market for defence products, hereby reinforcing the competitiveness of Europe's defence industry.

The draft directive is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

Motor vehicles type-approval - Emergency braking and lane departure warning systems

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of two regulations on the installation of advanced emergency braking systems ([18406/11](#)) and lane departure warning systems ([18606/11](#)).

These draft regulations will implement regulation 661/2009 for the purpose of type-approval requirements.

They are subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt them, unless the European Parliament objects.

FOOD LAW

Food additives

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation laying down specifications for food additives listed in annexes II and III to regulation 1333/2008 ([17451/11](#)).

The Commission regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

TRANSPORT

Requirements and procedures regarding civil aviation aircrew

The Council decided not to oppose adoption by the Commission of a regulation amending the Commission regulation of November 2011 on technical requirements and administrative procedures for civil aviation aircrew. Essentially, the new legal act complements the 2011 regulation by introducing rules on cabin crew qualifications and attestations, pilot training organisations, flight simulating training devices, aero-medical centres, and certification and oversight authorities ([18318/11](#)).

The draft regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny; now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

Air services agreement with Turkey *

The Council authorised the signing and provisional application of an agreement on certain aspects of air services between the EU and Turkey (Council decision: [18231/11](#); text of agreement: [18268/11](#); statements: [5035/12](#)).

The agreement supersedes or complements the existing bilateral agreements between individual member states and Turkey, bringing their provisions into line with EU law, in particular as regards non-discriminatory access of all EU air carriers to routes between the EU and Turkey, the taxation of aviation fuel and competition rules.

APPOINTMENTS

Committee of the Regions

The Council appointed Mr Markus WALLNER (Austria) and Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Ms Štěpánka FRAŇKOVÁ, Mr Dan JIRÁNEK and Mr Juraj THOMA (Czech Republic) as members of the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 25 January 2015 ([5844/12 + 5848/12](#)).