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# Report

# TAKING STOCK OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPE: WHAT WILL A EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA BRING?

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An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning is the new European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. The interest group works as a “watchdog” to what the European Union is doing.

## WELCOMING WORDS

LLL Interest Group chair MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen opened the meeting, welcoming this opportunity to assess the proposal for a **European Education Area**. Moderator Gina Ebner, EAEA, explained that based on the Interest Group's work on issues concerning training and lifelong learning over the last two years LLLP and EAEA have drafted Guiding Principles for Lifelong Learning. These principles will be developed over the course of this year through future Interest Group meetings. Ms Ebner felt it was fitting to present them in the presence of Vice-President Katainen's Cabinet and for consideration in developing the European Education Area.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Brikena Xhomaqi, LLLP, presented the **guiding principles** of lifelong learning based on the 2 year work of the interest group which cover 8 main areas:

- **Citizenship**  
Making civic education a priority and broadening the principles of the Paris Declaration to non-formal and informal learning sectors
- **Intercultural dialogue**  
Promoting learning mobilities as a tool for fostering this dialogue, strengthening a sense of European identity; promoting intercultural awareness and learning about other cultures
- **Critical thinking**  
Supporting learners in their assessment of attitudes and values; promoting media literacy, especially for the digital age
- **Learned centred approach**  
Adapting training to individual needs and making learning and personal well-being a central tenet of lifelong learning systems investments in education and lifelong learning  
Setting minimum level of investment at national level in education, training and lifelong learning to promote inclusion
- **World of work**  
Recognising complementarity between skills for life and skills for work; ensuring learners of all ages particularly adults are supported in developing the full range of skills including transversal skills
- **Support for educators**  
Ensuring adequate support, training and resources for teachers and educators to make it an



**BRIKENA XHOMAQI (LLL) AND GINA EBNER (EAEA) WITH MEP SIRPA PIETIKÄINEN**

attractive vocation and also supporting their mobility

- **Policy coherence**  
Strengthening dialogue between civil society and policy makers; ensuring that the European semester also explicitly addresses issues related to diversity and inclusion
- **Sustainable development**  
Mainstreaming the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"

Ms Xhomaqi explained that these principles provide an overview of what civil society would like the European Commission to take on board for the initiatives it is developing as part of the European Education Area.

## PRESENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA



**CHARLOTTE OLSSON-ALTANSUNAR FROM THE CABINET OF VICE-PRESIDENT KATAINEN**

Charlotte Olsson-Altansunar, Cabinet of Vice-President Katainen, European Commission, welcomed the presentation of the Guiding Principles for Lifelong Learning which touched on many points. She said **for Vice-President Katainen education and lifelong learning are crucial for the future of Europe** and he has been advocating for this for a long time. For the Commission the recent political attention that education received at the **Gothenburg Social Summit** was a very positive step forward.

Ms Olsson-Altansunar presented the package that was released on 17 January 2018 - the proposal for a Council recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning; Digital Education Action Plan; and proposal for

a Council recommendation on common values, inclusive education and European dimension of teaching. She explained a second broader package of measures moving work forward on the European Education Area would be released in early May - proposal for a Council Recommendation on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); for a Council recommendation on improving language learning; for a Council recommendation on promoting mutual recognition of diplomas and study periods abroad; a new youth strategy; an Action Plan on culture; Council conclusions on joint work on culture.

She elaborated that this package would also feed into a planned reflection paper on sustainable growth and its link to the Sustainable Development Goals; education will have a dedicated part in this paper.

## STATEMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, EUA asked if the Commission had already any concrete ideas concerning the proposal for a European network of universities and if this would be part of Erasmus+ programme or a separate initiative. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of **policy coherence as a principle**, stressing also the need to work with countries beyond the EU Member States, as is already the case with the Bologna process.

Valentina Pomatto, EEE-YFU recalled that despite the European Qualifications Framework a huge issue remains with people going abroad to study and afterwards having difficulties with the recognition of their diplomas.



Gina Ebner, EAEA, urged for a broader strategy that goes beyond formal education, looking into creating a Lifelong Learning Area.

David Lopez, LLLP and Solidar, called for the **crucial role of civil society** to be recognised as the proposals do not make real mention of it.

Marguerite Potard, WOSM, stressed that non-formal education was not addressed enough in the European Education Area Communication, and also failed to make a link with the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, for which the deadline for implementation is already this year.

Panagiotis Chatzimichail, YEU International also drew attention to 2018 as the deadline for Member States to implement the Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, insisting that the European Education Area needs to follow up on what Member States have and have not done. Likewise **within the framework of the European Education Area, we need to bear in mind that the EU will have new Member States joining after 2020**, so the benefits this could bring concerning recognition of diplomas, for example, should not only be limited to current Member States but should also be expanded to future EU citizens.

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen highlighted the importance of the social agenda and how Europe needs to mean more for people than competition and the internet market - the guiding principles presented were useful in this respect. She insisted on the **need to break down silos thinking** and agreed with the points raised on widening the scope beyond formal education, stressing the value of learning through life experience and lifelong learning. She called for a European framework, a kind of “lifelong learning passport”, which would facilitate the recognition the skills gained through non-formal and informal learning. She also emphasised the value of e-learning, calling for the materials available on online platforms to be of good quality.

Charlotte Olsson-Altanasunar, European Commission, explained that the idea of a European network of universities is still being developed. **Some universities in Europe already work on joint degrees and the idea is to roll this out further, paying attention to inclusion and not only excellence.** She said that study periods abroad should be taken into account and this is the Commission’s endeavor, but they are only in initial contact with Member States on this issue, so it is too early for the moment to say how this will develop.

Ms Olsson-Altanasunar explained that in Vice-President Katainen’s view **education should be broader than only labour market demands**, this is only one aspect and even employers themselves do not know what skills they will need from the workforce in a few years. Education should focus on enhancing people’s resilience and readiness for the future. For now they are focusing on formal education because that is the Commission has the concrete tools, such as the Country Specific Recommendations under the European Semester process where more emphasis will be given to education and skills reforms and support for Member States in this respect, e.g. exchange of policy support on teacher training. She took on board the point concerning the absence of non-formal and informal learning, but reassured that **nothing is limiting Member States to cooperate** more in this area; for now, they wished to have a clearly defined scope for the initiatives to facilitate agreement. She said there will continue to be scope for non-formal and informal learning under the EU’s funding programmes. Regarding the geographical scope of the proposals, she understood this was a heated debate but for now the initiative on the recognition of upper secondary diplomas is so far only for EU Member states.



## COMMISSION PACKAGE ON COMMON VALUES, KEY COMPETENCES AND DIGITAL SKILLS

Gina Ebner, EAEA welcomed the paper on the key competences revision as it has a strong basis in lifelong learning and strong policy coherence, takes into consideration different target groups, makes reference to the Sustainable Development Goals and European Pillar of Social Rights, and has strengthened the focus on civic competences. However, she pointed out a policy coherence issues concerning the Council recommendation on common values, inclusive education and European dimension of teaching as the action points are almost exclusively focused on schools.



Brikena Xhomaqi, LLLP, welcomed the overall improvement in the key competences revision but stressed that, as was the case for the previous framework, the problem is not so much the definition but the implementation. This requires further reflection. She explained that **the framework has been too heavily focused on schools and not applied widely enough in other learning environments.** Good examples of how to implement the competences in different sectors need to be compiled

and serve as a basis for building on the work carried out so far, especially in non-formal and informal learning settings. She also pointed out that “learning to learn” has been merged in the revised framework with other competences which could risk undermining its importance - to ensure people’s resilience they need to learn how to learn.

Concerning the Education Summit taking place on 25 January, Ms Xhomaqi pointed out that although actively involved in discussions and consultations with the Commission on many of the issues mentioned so far, **many civil society organisations were excluded as participants with the notion that they are the “usual suspects” or for limited capacity issues.** Although it is understandable that Member States are the priority, all the work civil society has done to support policy change at national and local level should not



be forgotten.

Valentina Pomatto, EEE-YFU, asked how the Commission intends to follow-up with monitoring the implementation of the Paris Declaration - there was a comprehensive report one year after the adoption but will there be a second reporting phase, she asked. She considered it problematic that the implementation of the Paris Declaration can be very diverse across the Member States.

Andrew Todd, LLLP, said the Digital Education Action Plan was a useful proposal for supporting innovation and infrastructure for educational establishments, but the **emphasis on reaching out to support vulnerable groups needs to be reinforced.**

**MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen recalled the importance of addressing the issue of digital literacy and making better use of digital tools to help people build up their skills.** In addition, she said that although formal education can, for example, teach about the functioning of the EU, civil society organisations are the real promoters of Europe and allow for people to engage in debate about what they want from Europe. But they lack adequate investment to carry out this work. Charlotte Olsson-Altanasunar, European Commission explained that the idea behind the key competence revision was to modernise the document from 2006 and stressed the Member States are working to implement it and the Commission is sending the overall message to them to continue this work. Implementation is up to the Member States, so it is an issue that should be flagged up to local, regional and national authorities. The Commission can facilitate the exchange of good practices but this is triggered by demand; the demand has to come from the Member States themselves.

In terms of the Digital Education Action Plan, Ms Olsson-Altanasunar remarked that they have decided to focus on what can be concretely delivered within the next two years and that it should only be seen as a starting point. She said the point on the social inclusion dimension was valid and pointed out that the pilot scheme WiFi4EU currently being rolled out can somehow contribute in this regard by improving connectivity in rural areas. As regards the common values Recommendation, Ms Olsson-Altanasunar explained that it is a follow-up to the Paris Declaration with a view to encompassing its scope. Concerning the Education Summit, she said she was not aware of the rejection of organisations working on previous consultations, but she would take this point on board. She recalled that **the European Education Area is a vision coming from the European Commission, she is glad to see that the European Parliament and civil society have welcomed it and expressed the hope that the proposal, even if not perfect at the moment, would nevertheless be picked up by the Member States.**



## CONCLUDING WORDS

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen concluded the debate by thanking Ms Olsson-Altansunar and all participants for their contribution. She expressed the hope that non-formal education and lifelong learning would be reflected well in the package that the Commission is preparing for early May.



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The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

Visit our website  
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>

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