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SUBCOMMITTEE IV ON FLANKING AND HORIZONTAL POLICIES

EEA EFTA COMMENT ON THE FUTURE PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH (2014–2020)

The EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) are looking forward to the Commission's proposals for future programmes in the field of education, training and youth (2014–2020). As full participants in the EU programmes (such as the Lifelong Learning Programme, Youth in Action and Erasmus Mundus), the EEA EFTA States will continue to play an active part in the coming programmes and would hereby like to present some comments on the priorities and the shaping of the future programmes.

Political priorities

As a follow up to *Europe 2020*, a focus on reducing dropouts and securing the completion of studies at all levels of education and training should be priority areas in the opinion of the EEA EFTA States. The future programmes should support cooperation for developing new and innovative measures (coherent in the Member States) preventing dropouts, whilst correlating with the policy fields of employment, social policy and youth. Modernisation of higher education would be important in order to secure a high rate of completion, including better access for new groups of students, and more cooperation between academia and industry in order to improve graduates' employability. EEA EFTA States support ongoing emphasis on adult education to increase the competences of people in the labour market.

The Youth Programme will play an important role in the implementation of *Europe 2020* as well as in the implementation of the new framework for future youth policy (2010-2018). The cross-sectorial approach to youth policy of the new framework is in line with the traditions of the EEA EFTA States. Participation of children and youth in society is of utmost importance for the development of democracy in Europe. Youth unemployment has been a serious problem in most countries and effective measures for social inclusion are necessary in order to avoid marginalisation in society.

Furthermore, it is important to secure quality in all aspects and at all levels of education and training. We would like to see stronger emphasis on pedagogical development in the future programmes, through for instance the establishment of European Centres of Excellence for learning and teaching and/or the creation of European networks for such centres. Measures to promote quality should focus on the staff development of teachers and trainers, as well as on

pre-primary school (ECEC) and school development projects and university governance. Furthermore the future programmes should help develop continuous systems for lifelong learning and establish good models for well functioning transitions between different levels in the education systems, including adult education.

Another important priority should be improving both the attractiveness of VET and the relevance of vocational education for the labour market in order to make students and pupils more employable. Lastly, even if the EU has made significant progress in the number of graduates in math, science and technology, an emphasis on improving the performance of pupils and students within these subjects is still strongly needed.

As a follow-up to the Youth on the Move flagship initiative, mobility should still be at the core of the programmes and based on quality, especially within VET and higher education, as this is an important instrument in improving other aspects, like for instance the relevance of education and the attractiveness of VET and higher education. Focus should be placed on removing the obstacles to mobility, whilst providing everyone with an equal opportunity to participate. Mobility of staff and students should be based on or provide for institutional cooperation.

Structure

The EEA EFTA States are following the preparation of the new generation of programmes. In general we support the current programmes' structures in the field of education, training and youth. We recommend continuing with two separate programmes in the future. The EEA EFTA States believe it is important to retain most of the established brand names within the programmes in the field of education, training and youth. In any case, the future programmes should differentiate between different focus groups and formal and non-formal sectors of education, training and youth.

Furthermore it is imperative to pursue the efforts to simplify the administrative requirements and bureaucratic burdens for the users of the programmes. One initiative to support simplification would be to merge the Comenius and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, so that schools with both vocational and academic programmes do not have to apply and report according to separate procedures.

We also believe that individual exchanges of school pupils should be given another chance in the next programme period, as it is important both for the development of the individual pupils concerned and for the schools involved in these exchanges.

The pre-primary school (ECEC) sector is particularly important to secure a good basis for lifelong learning for everyone, irrespective of background. To promote further development of quality in pre-school education, the new programmes should therefore prioritise cooperation activities within this field.

Lastly, the merging of Erasmus with Erasmus Mundus and Marie Curie might prove effective in promoting a better policy for international mobility of both students and staff in higher education institutions, as this will facilitate a continuum of activities from student exchanges via exchanges of young researchers to that of senior academic staff. It could also be a measure to simplify the administrative and bureaucratic burdens for the users and administrators of the programmes.

Financing

As far as the EEA EFTA States understand, some of the ideas for the financing of activities within the field of education, training and youth in the future programmes suggest the incorporation of budget lines that today are not covered by the EEA Agreement. We are concerned that with the possible inclusion of the Structural Funds and the European Investment Bank as funding sources for the new programmes, this could potentially limit the participation of the EEA EFTA States. It is very important to continue our valued and successful participation in this field. We would hence suggest that this aspect is taken into consideration in order to not exclude the non-Member States that are already fully part of the programmes in the field of education, training and youth. We are also ready to discuss this situation with the European Commission and the Member States in order to find a pragmatic solution that will benefit all parties concerned.
