

INFORMAL MEETING OF MINISTERS FOR EDUCATION

Prague, 23 March 2009

- Czech Presidency Communiqué -

Eight Key Points for the Recovery of Europe from the Perspective of Ministers Responsible for Education

The Czech Presidency summarises the discussion of education ministers from 27 EU Member States, the countries of the European Economic Area and the candidate countries who gathered together at an informal meeting in Prague on 22-23 March 2009, as follows:

The current economic crisis together with other social challenges that Europe has been facing for some time now, require immediate and efficient measures that will aid long-term economic and social development, reinforce competitiveness on a global scale, support employability, and strengthen social cohesion. Investments in human resources through education and training have an important role to play in this regard. Concrete and specific steps that could contribute to fulfilling the above mentioned goals are as follows:

1) Effectively using the existing resources and maintaining or increasing investments into education and training

The need for up-skilling and re-training of displaced workers and the expected higher enrolment rate of students during the crisis will increase the demand for education and training. Hence, more than ever, the current financial situation in the private and public sectors calls for the placing of an emphasis on the efficient investment of existing funds and searching for new funding. Simultaneously, various non-financial support instruments could be utilised, especially from the perspective of cooperation with enterprises.

2) Focusing on skills and key competences supporting people's employability, flexibility and adaptability

Changes in society and in the labour market, especially in the context of changing qualification needs and the threat of rising levels of unemployment, are imposing higher demands and requirements on education and training systems. In order to increase individuals employability, they need to be flexible and adaptable, and have an ability to respond to quickly-changing requirements. Education and training systems should be flexible enough to provide corresponding skills and key competences to all individuals that will enable them to face these challenges and to take good career decisions. The curricula should be developed to

meet this goal. The quality of teachers and trainers and lifelong guidance is of high importance.

3) Fostering entrepreneurship and promoting creativity and innovation

Europe needs to foster an entrepreneurial mindset, with an emphasis on the development of individuals creative potential. This is of key importance for individuals employability, developing their sense of initiative and their ability to cope with a changing environment.

4) Developing dialogue and cooperation with social partners, particularly with employers and enterprises

The current situation puts an increased emphasis on education and training systems being open to the needs of all individuals entering the labour market on the one hand, and to employers on the other. Social partners play a role in this dialogue. It is necessary to encourage a functioning dialogue between education and training institutions and employers that will help to more precisely define the needs of these parties and the mechanisms needed for their fulfilment. This dialogue will encourage employers to maintain and/or increase their investment in human capital, and it will help education and training systems to provide the skills that are relevant for labour market needs.

5) Strengthening the role of education from the perspective of the knowledge triangle and its connection to research, development and innovation

A modern successful economy today must be based on knowledge and operated by creative and innovative people. Hence, especially from the long-term perspective, it is necessary to focus on strengthening the role of education within the knowledge triangle, particularly through the development of relevant competences, through fostering the interconnection with research and development, and with an emphasis on the modernization of higher education. The EU's ambition to move towards a more energy efficient, low carbon economy provides a significant opportunity and challenge to many policy areas including education policy.

6) Promoting lifelong learning and supporting further education and retraining

In this time of quickly changing qualification requirements, increasing unemployment and an aging population, further education and retraining play a significant role, particularly as a means for assisting reintegration into the labour market, or the development of a person's own initiatives. It is necessary, therefore, to put lifelong learning strategies based on lifelong and life-wide approach into practice and support various forms of further education, and allowing and encouraging flexible pathways in the education and training system. An important aspect of lifelong learning is also the recognition of learning outcomes in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments and the development of qualification frameworks.

7) Supporting social cohesion, active citizenship and the sense of social responsibility

As solidarity and social awareness are threatened during the crisis, the role of education and training systems is to promote social responsibility and intercultural dialogue. Education should strive to develop in learners positive attitudes toward citizenship, and active involvement in solving problems, placing an emphasis on interpersonal relations in today's diverse society and supporting democratic and ethical values, which are of particular importance in times of crisis. Since education and training is of fundamental importance for the integration of all individuals into society, it should support especially those that are more vulnerable in the labour market, in particular youngsters or people coming from disadvantaged background, so that they are able to make the most of the opportunities available.

8) Promoting European cooperation in education and training

Since the economic and financial crisis hits each country in Europe to a various extent and each of them responds to the crisis differently, European cooperation in education and training plays a significant role especially in sharing good practice examples. The new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, which is planned to be adopted in May Council, should help fulfilling all the above-mentioned goals.