

EDUCATION AT THE HEART OF THE NEW STRATEGY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2020

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The Spanish Presidency of the European Union offers Spain in general and our education policy in particular, an opportunity that we must seize.

This situation offers Spain the possibility to hold a leadership position to foster the processes to improve, modernize and extend training to all education levels, in line with the processes that are currently taking place in Europe.

That is why Spain is working with the European Commission and the three Presidencies (Spain, Belgium, and Hungary) on the development of a new political agenda, in which the European Union Education Council adopts conclusions and future working lines on the priorities of the Spanish Presidency in issues as relevant as:

- The role of education in the post-2010 Lisbon strategy
- Updating the strategic framework of education and training 2020,
- The social dimension of education,
- The basic responsibilities in vocational training, developing new abilities for new jobs,
- The internationalization of higher education and the modernization of universities.

Our Presidency takes place in a period of economic crisis which poses challenges, but also offers opportunities that we cannot let go. At these times of crisis it is more necessary than ever to lay the foundations of a new sustainable economic development that is socially responsible and in which education plays a fundamental role.

Education at the heart of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy

The first priority of our Presidency is to place education and training at the heart EU policies, making it a central component of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, which will most likely be adopted by the European Council in spring 2010.

The crucial importance of this priority in Education can only be understood if we acknowledge the modest role that such a vital aspect played in the European Convention and the Treaty that establishes a European Constitution, and hence, in the Lisbon Treaty. The last modification of the Original Community Law, indeed maintains the Union's powers regarding Education and Training, which symbolizes a long temporary horizon. That is why, without underestimating the potentialities of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, we must maximize the modest powers and valuable mechanisms that already exist. Amongst them is the vital Lisbon Strategy.

For the above reasons, the political agenda, agreed on by the three Presidents, establishes that education and training must become engines to improve employment, competitiveness, innovation, cultural development, social inclusion and in short, to attain a better economic development and social welfare.

Education is the base for the EU to remain a region of economic prosperity and social cohesion, facing the challenges of globalization and demography (progressive ageing and multi-culturalization of our societies).

Today it is clear that in the EU we are far from achieving the initial objectives of the Lisbon Strategy of *"becoming in 2010 the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world"*. But this discovery, as well as the present challenges of re-launching sustainable economic growth, fighting unemployment, strengthening social cohesion and strengthening active citizenship, must not intimidate us but give the impulse to set a new vision for EU 2020, learning the lessons of what has happened until now.

Until now, education and training have not been priority issues but have been part of integrated orientations for economic growth and employment. Now it is clearer than ever that the strategy to solve the immediate needs of relaunching the economy and

employment recovery, as well as long term sustainable economic and social development, must consider education and training as key factors for the development of the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion.

In order to come up with a solution to great global challenges facing our societies: energy, climate change, food, water, migration, overpopulation, fight against poverty, etc., education and training must become the pillars of the knowledge society in this new era. We could establish a parallelism with past periods of history, such as 15th and 16th centuries Renaissance where the new ideas of agriculture, trade, society governance, scientific methods development, etc., promoted a period of prosperity and blossoming in the arts and techniques and development of human kind, enabling productivity and competitiveness that came with the Industrial Revolution.

We now need a new Renaissance founded on education and training, where society and economy can develop from knowledge, boosting the pillars of research and the innovation of the knowledge triangle, to which the Spanish Presidency intends to add a new pillar: that of the social dimension and responsibility of education at all its levels, and especially for higher education.

The key aspects for this Renaissance will be the promotion of higher and more efficient investment levels in education and training. This is necessary to improve and update citizens' knowledge and power to survive the crisis, as well as face the challenges of economic competitiveness, employment, active citizenship and social inclusion.

Likewise, establishing the knowledge society will require more integration of the three elements of the knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation, moving towards a European Knowledge Area that combines the communitarian ambition to create the European Research Area and the European Area of Higher Education.

Updating the strategic framework of education and training 2020

During the Spanish Presidency the ties between the strategic framework of cooperation in Education and Training 2020 (E&T 2020) and the global strategy of Lisbon post-2010 EU will be reinforced. We will try to improve the contribution of applying the open method of coordination in education and training with aspects that are not directly related to the objective of growth and employment and to the Renewed Social Agenda.

Here again, the limited fulfillment of the ambitious indicators and reference points of the E&F 2010 strategic framework, with the fulfillment of a single set objective (participation in long life learning, early school dropout, completion of secondary education studies, reading), the one referring to the number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology, makes it necessary to redefine this strategy of cooperation in education and training among the Member States and the Commission.

It is necessary for all European citizens to acquire the required knowledge and competences to attain the best possible personal and social development. Education and training at all levels must prepare citizens to face the economic and social changes the new model of sustainable economic development will bring, providing the necessary skills for the new jobs of an economy with low pollutant emissions (carbon) and based on knowledge.

For this reason, the Spanish Presidency will focus on the 4 strategic axes of cooperation agreed on by the Member States:

- Making long life learning and mobility a reality,
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training,
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship,
- Reinforcing creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship at all educational levels.

The joint work among the Member States, the Commission and our Presidency will be based on reinforcing the open method of coordination with a selection of objectives, indicators, mutual learning and the exchange and selection of new practices.

Regarding long life learning, we will insist on adapting results and grades to the needs of the labour market, in the context of the European framework of grades, setting more flexible learning systems that are open to formal and informal learning.

Likewise, there will be a Conference in the context the Long life Learning Program, to be held in May, and which will open the debate on the new generation of European educational programs, a debate which will go on during the consecutive presidencies.

We will go further in the search for synergies between the Bologna Process for high education, the Copenhagen Process for vocational training and the strategic framework for European cooperation in E&F 2020.

The Dimension and Social Responsibility of Education

The Spanish Presidency will pay special attention to promoting the social dimension and equity of education, social cohesion and active citizenship that determine social legitimization of the European construction process, especially related to education.

We will work to reduce educational disadvantages: access in equal conditions to quality infant and primary education; fight against early school dropout at all levels; inclusive education policies for those for students with special needs and social inclusion for the underprivileged such as emigrants or cultural minorities.

Integrating these principles into all educational levels should guarantee access to everyone, including the underprivileged, to appropriate education and training.

We will promote the social dimension in the construction of the European Higher Education Area, as well as guaranteeing the return of knowledge to society through the social responsibility of universities. The transfer of knowledge must aim at securing welfare.

With the objective to insist on these aspects, the Spanish Presidency will organize the following conferences:

- *“Inclusive education: a way to favour social cohesion”*, in collaboration with the European Agency of special educational needs.
- *“The Dimension and social responsibility of universities”* in collaboration with the European Commission’s Commissariat for Education.

Besides, as it is a relevant aspect in the agenda of our Tri-presidency, we will foster the role of education and training in making progress towards social cohesion and active citizenship, boosting transversal responsibilities, including intercultural responsibilities, entrepreneurship and social skills, respect to democratic values, fundamental rights and the environment, as well as the fight against all forms of discrimination.

This is particularly appropriate because during 2010 we will celebrate the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion, and our Presidency cannot remain oblivious to this because the role of education and training in this fight is determinant.

The basic competences in professional training and the development of new skills for new jobs

Vocational Training is a key factor for social and economic development as well as the progress of society. This is even truer in the current context of economic recovery, where the adaptation of the demands of current and future competences of the labour market to competences provided by the education system is more necessary than ever.

The training and education systems must create new skills, respond to the nature of new jobs that are expected to be created and improve the compatibility and employability of adults that are already on the labour market. We must encourage innovative cooperation between education and training institutions and social and economic agents, in order to promote more flexible systems based on demand.

In this context, during the Spanish Presidency, community priority policies regarding vocational training will be reviewed and renewed to strengthen the appeal and quality of vocational training, adjusting it more to the needs of the labour market and with the results and grades of lifelong learning.

During this Tri-presidency, we intend to make forward in the implementation of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF). The implementation of the European Framework of Grades will undoubtedly increase the transparency of grades and will enable access to additional learning.

During the Spanish Presidency there will be a Conference to debate the different procedures that facilitate the evaluation and accreditation of the acquired competences through work experience and non-formal training, as a fundamental factor to improve access and promotion of employment as well as to facilitate lifelong learning throughout a lifetime.

The Spanish Presidency also intends to pay attention to promoting adult education, improving student orientation systems and the governance of vocational training

institutions, improving cooperation between education and training institutions and businesses and industry on the basis of internship training programs.

The internationalization of higher education and the modernization of universities

In spite of the central role universities play and will play in contemporary Europe, Higher Education must play a relevant role in the EU. This is due to a series of facts: the modest impact of competences in the education sphere at the level of the community, as a historical constant. More recently, the strength of the emergence European Higher Education Area is noteworthy. The fact that this Area has emerged outside the strict framework of the community has been understood in some political and academic sectors as a limit to the development of those same competences within the Union.

Fortunately, the majority of people believe that these areas strengthen each other mutually and they must converge. Likewise, we will also promote agreements within the EU as priorities of the Spanish Presidency in relation to higher and university education.

The milestone that the Bologna Process represents for the creation of this European Higher Education Area will be reflected during our Presidency with meetings of the Monitoring Group of Bologna and the ministerial meeting to prepare the next stage of the shaping and convergence process of higher education in Europe, during which the results of an independent assessment of the process will be presented.

In line with the priorities of Spanish Presidency on the modernization and internationalization of universities, we will aim to increase synergies and coherence between the Bologna Process and the agenda for modernization of universities. This way, the role of higher education in the new model of sustainable economic growth, social dimension and equity in education, and the internationalization of higher education will become priorities.

The European Higher Education Area has awakened the interest of different regions in the world, not only due to the policy of external aid and education projects and programs of the Commission, but also to its educational programs: Erasmus or

Erasmus Mundus, which aim to attract the world's best talents to Europe; or the Tempus program, which promotes projects of modernization of universities in cooperation with third countries. More specific European initiatives such as the European Framework of grades and the European Technology Institute, together with the Bologna Process, can be a model for different regions in the world.

This interest legitimizes the process and is an urge to open it up beyond the European borders. The Spanish Presidency intends to foster university cooperation beyond the borders of the Union, giving privilege to some regions in the world with which there are common ties. In February 2010, a conference on the Internationalization of Higher Education will be held, to present the European Higher Education Area to the world and to discuss the specific objectives of the European Union in a global context, in order to identify new ways of international cooperation in higher education between the EU and the world.

We will foster the holding of forum meetings, seminars and debates among experts, political leaders and representatives of all economic and social agents involved in higher and university education, in order to go further in mutual learning by exchanging experiences, collecting better practices and making recommendations to progress in: i) the integration between education and innovation with a conference on New Models of Enterprising University, ii) the interaction between the university and the city and the territory, and its contribution to socioeconomic development of the region, iii) University, Knowledge and Development for the next decade, on the role of higher education in economic development based on knowledge.

Through these activities we aim to shape and foster the modernization and internationalization processes of universities in Europe, without forgetting their social dimension and contribution to the generation of a new model of sustainable economic growth with environmentally responsible.

Our Presidency is based on an idea as simple as true: education is the only secure value for the future of a mature society. This holds true for the Member States and for a Union, which, as an eternal chrysalis, cannot complete its process without conferring education the vital role conferred to it by citizens.

Education and training were vital before the economic crisis, but after the recession, knowing how to identify all its potentiality will be a proof that Europe has been brave enough to learn from past mistakes and wager on a true society of justice and freedom. And for this, education must be placed at the heart of economy to make it sustainable in all senses.