

The Priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union for Education, Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Sport

Presentation before the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament by the Cyprus Minister of Education and Culture

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Madame President,
Honorable members of the European Parliament,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity you give us to introduce before of your Committee the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the European Union in the fields of Education, Youth, Culture, Audiovisual and Sport.

Cyprus assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union for its first time under the current difficult economic circumstances. The conditions are difficult not only for Cyprus, but for all European countries. Now more than ever, European Union should stand closer to its citizens. It is important to put people at the center of the EU policies and to send a strong message of hope and solidarity. Furthermore, the credibility of the European Union should be restored, not only to the labour market, but mainly to its citizens. In this context, the Presidency will work, as far as possible, in a pragmatic and practical manner 'Towards a Better Europe'.

EDUCATION

New Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport

Allow me briefly analyze the issues to be addressed during the Cyprus Presidency, beginning with the new Programme for Education, Youth and Sport «Erasmus for all».

After the partial general agreement reached during the Danish Presidency, the Cyprus Presidency intends to initiate a dialogue with the European Parliament in order to address the views and concerns of the elected representatives of the European Union. The great convergence of views that we have seen between the positions of the Council, as expressed in the partial general approach, and the known, until now, positions of the European Parliament, allow us to be optimistic that the European citizens will soon have a new programme for education, youth and sport.

Under the partial general approach, the Council has endeavoured to strike a careful balance by introducing a number of amendments to the proposal. These include:

- *ensuring greater visibility for the youth sector (through a separate chapter for youth (Chapter II.A), a separate budget allocation (Art 13.1.a) and increased access for non-organised youth (Art.17.1);*
- *giving Member States greater flexibility with regard to implementation (Art. 21, 22);*
- *guaranteeing minimum levels of spending for each education (Art.13.3a),*
- *maintaining support for the six European academic institutions which currently receive funding under the Jean Monnet activities of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Art.10c);*
- *broadening access to ensure the participation of persons with special needs or fewer opportunities (Art.17.2).*

At the same time, the text maintains the benefits of simplification and synergies which lie behind the European Commission's proposal.

Literacy - Council Conclusions

Many young people in Europe lack basic literacy skills, a fact which hinders their employability and may lead to social exclusion. Tackling illiteracy will help to make progress in a range of other areas, such as poverty, employability and healthy living.

The Cyprus Presidency will promote the adoption of Council Conclusions on the issue of literacy, seeking to tackle illiteracy by providing qualitative education and training. The Conclusions will be based on the report of the High-Level Group on Literacy, together with the outcomes of an important Conference on literacy to be held in Nicosia on 5-6 September 2012 and the results of the debate which will take place among the Education Ministers during the Informal Meeting of Education Ministers to be held in Nicosia on 4-5 of October.

The contribution of Education and Training to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy - Council Conclusions on the contribution of Education and Training to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy

The Joint Report on 'ET2020' implementation adopted by the Council in February this year suggests a closer link of the 'ET2020 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training to Europe 2020. The report outlines a proposal for systematic peer reviews involving Member States on a voluntary basis.

It is with this background that the Cyprus Presidency will seek to maintain and strengthen the role of education and training in achieving the objectives of the Strategy "Europe 2020". One of the ideas currently being explored is to organize a "pilot" peer-review exercise sometime in September. Discussions are under way with those Member States which have declared a willingness to participate actively in the exercise. After the review, the Presidency plans to report jointly to an informal gathering of education ministers in October before

proposing to the Council in November the adoption of conclusions on the contribution of education to the challenges of Europe 2020 strategy.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning - Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning

There is one final education dossier to which I should refer today, namely a long-awaited Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In 2006 the Council adopted a Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field. However, the economic crisis and its consequent high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people, have given fresh impetus to the subject. There is now widespread recognition of the contribution which non-formal education (i.e. learning which takes place outside the formal education system) can make towards personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability as part of the lifelong learning process.

YOUTH

Participation and social inclusion of young people with a migrant background - Council Conclusions

The Youth Sector's priority is the participation and social inclusion of young people with a migrant background. The negative impact of the economic crisis has led to increasing mobility and a tendency to migrate, which contribute to the diversity evident in the whole of the European Union. The participation of young people and youth organizations in decision making will be highlighted as an important factor in achieving prosperous societies. The role of non-formal and informal learning and the work of youth workers and youth organizations in promoting social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, especially those with migrant background will also be emphasized.

The views of young people themselves and youth organizations on the subject will continue to be collected through the structured dialogue process and will be discussed at the EU Youth Conference on 11 to 13 September in Nicosia. The Joint Recommendations to be adopted at the conference will contribute to the Council conclusions prepared by the Cyprus Presidency, with a view to their adoption in November at the Council of Ministers of Youth.

Overview of the second cycle of the Structured Dialogue

The Structured Dialogue process is the main tool of the European Union in ensuring youth's involvement in decision making. The aim is to involve a wide range of young people and youth organizations in the public consultations and the European Youth Conferences. The European Youth Conference in Nicosia completes the eighteen-month cycle of the structured dialogue of our Trio Presidency with the overall priority of youth participation in democratic life in Europe. The Cyprus Presidency aims to adopt a Council Resolution on the overview of this cycle of the Structured Dialogue, which will commit the political priorities of the next Trio Presidency.

EU Youth Report - Council Conclusions

The Structured Dialogue has close links with the EU Youth Report which will be released by the European Commission in early September 2012. The report, which corresponds to the first cycle of the EU strategy for youth, will cover the years 2010 to 2012. It will assess the progress made towards achieving the general objectives of the first three years of the Strategy for Youth (2010 - 2018), and highlight good practices.

The report will be based on national reports prepared by Member States and submitted to the European Commission in January 2012 and will take account of the cross-sectoral approach to the issues of the Youth Sector. This report will propose further policy recommendations and priorities for the next three-year work cycle. The policy recommendations are likely to reflect the impact of the rising youth unemployment in areas such as social inclusion, health and wellness.

The report will be examined by the Cyprus Presidency in order to be adopted by the Council of Youth Ministers in November 2012.

CULTURE

Next, I will present the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency in the field of Culture, a public good for Europe, affecting every aspect of our modern society.

Europe for Citizens

During the current crisis affecting Europe, initiatives such as the “Europe for Citizens” programme are particularly important. This kind of programme, despite its relatively small budget has a great importance because it can help create a bridge between Europe and its citizens.

For this reason the Council attached a high priority to the proposed programme “Europe for Citizens”. During the Danish Presidency, on the 10th of May, the Council was able to reach, unanimously, a partial general approach on this programme. The approach was partial as it could not cover the financial envelope due to the ongoing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework.

I am, of course, aware of the Parliament’s concern regarding the type of legislative procedure for the program’s adoption. I am, however, confident that together we will resolve this issue. After all, what matters to our citizens is that the European Parliament and the Council are able to work together to deliver a programme of such symbolic importance to the European people.

The Cyprus Presidency will seek to engage all parties in a constructive dialogue with a view of reaching a consensus.

European Capital of Culture

The European Capital of Culture is one of the most important cultural initiatives of the European Union. The impact of the European Capital of Culture event goes far beyond the sphere of culture. It has a potential to radically transform cities and shape their long-term development.

The current system for selecting cities to host European Capital of Culture will come to an end in 2019, and it is time to reflect on the system for the year 2020 and beyond. The Cyprus Presidency is delighted that a proposal for the continuation of the European Capital of Culture will be submitted during its term of office. Indeed the Commission is expected to adopt its proposal very soon, in mid-July. The Cyprus Presidency will start working on the proposal with a view to deliver concrete results for the November Council.

The governance of culture in today's globalised world - Council Conclusions

An important priority of the Cyprus Presidency in the field of culture is cultural governance. The ongoing economic crisis puts additional pressure on the efficient and effective use of public finances. A specific challenge in governing culture is that cultural sector is by definition horizontal. Therefore cultural governance needs to focus not only on mobilizing resources and human capital within the sector, but also on integrating culture into the heart of public policy agenda.

In this context, the Cyprus Presidency willing to initiate a debate on some aspects of cultural governance, has set as its main objectives: a) the further promotion of the social aspect of culture, b) the promotion of cultural governance and c) the strengthening of cultural research and of evidence-based policy for culture.

In continuation to what I previously mentioned, the Cyprus Presidency will propose a set of Council Conclusions on cultural governance with a view to be adopted at the Council in November 2012. In relation to this topic, the Cyprus

Presidency will organise a meeting which will take place in Nicosia on 28 and 29 of August 2012.

The outcomes of this meeting will feed in the process of the preparation of the Council Conclusions.

AUDIOVISUAL

In the context of the audiovisual field, the overall priority of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union is strengthening the competitiveness of the European cultural and creative sectors to effectively adapt to the digital age of globalisation, to enhance European cultural and linguistic diversity as well as social cohesion and protection of vulnerable social groups like children.

Creative Europe

Regarding the programme "Creative Europe", thanks to the Danish Presidency and their hard work, the Council was able to reach a partial general approach on the Creative Europe proposal at its meeting on 10th of May. The agreement was partial as it did not include budgetary provisions due to the ongoing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework. After an exchange of views between Ministers in the Council of 10 May, the Cyprus Presidency intends to pursue the discussion on the Loan Guarantee Facility for the creative and cultural sectors, which is part of the Commission's proposal for the Regulation of "Creative Europe ". The Cyprus Presidency looks forward to an ongoing, constructive cooperation with the European Parliament, so that we can prepare a programme for the creative and cultural sectors which promotes creativity and cultural diversity, offers equal opportunities for all and strikes an excellent balance between the intrinsic and economic value of culture.

Better Internet for Children - Council Conclusions

The Cyprus Presidency has set itself the objective of, inter alia, social inclusion, sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life for European citizens. This is also our aim in the context of audiovisual policy and in particular the use and exploitation of digital technologies which, nowadays, are increasingly becoming an important part in the lives of children and young people.

We must ensure that the entire online world is safe for our children, and to provide high quality content for young people. Such content will both educate and raise awareness for potential risks encountered online. Where necessary there should be action against illegal and harmful content. As we all know, last May the Commission presented the prospect of a continuation of the strategy in the field of ' Safer Internet ', with the name "European strategy for a Better Internet for children". The Cyprus Presidency is proposing a set of Council Conclusions on this topic to be adopted by the Council in November this year.

SPORT

With reference to the field of Sport Cyprus Presidency will address both the social aspect of sport as well as its economic dimension as these are prescribed in the Commission's White Paper for Sport. Cyprus Presidency will focus on the following four themes:

Sport and Health – Council Conclusions

With the increasing sedentary life style of Europeans, the increase in obesity as well as the increase in average life span of the population of our Union, sport can help towards a healthier, more creative and longer active population, contributing significantly towards the targets of EU's 2020 Strategy. Against this background the Cyprus Presidency will prepare a set of Council Conclusions which will contribute to the establishment of a new initiative that will promote both active citizenship and physical activity with the aim to improve public health.

Emphasis will be given on the implementation of the EU Physical Activity Guidelines by the Member States, the improved co-operation between the sectors of sport and health and also the creation of additional jobs in the sphere of active ageing through physical activity.

Evidence-based Sport Policy – Council Conclusions

The limited evidence we have at the moment indicates that sport contributes anything between 1.5% and 2% of the total added value generated in the European Union. This economic potential of sport can be utilized to strengthen economic growth and employment. Aiming towards intensifying the work that is already underway in many Member States with the guidance of the expert group “Sport and Statistics”, the Cyprus Presidency has planned for relevant Council Conclusions to portray both the necessity and the usefulness of statistical information for sport and physical activity to the Member States and EUROSTAT.

Match Fixing – Council Resolution

The increased commercialization of sport in association with the rapid development of on line sport betting, besides positive effects, it seems to have contributed to the rise of match fixing. Match fixing is a threat to the sport’s biggest asset, its integrity. The Cyprus Presidency will follow the work of the Hungarian, the Polish and the Danish Presidencies in this area. During the “EU Sport Forum”, that will take place in Nicosia on the 19th and 20th of September 2012, an effort will be made to issue a joint declaration with the sport movement towards combating match fixing. In addition, the work done on match fixing by the expert group “Good Governance” will be a useful tool for the November EYCS Council.

Anti-doping

During the six months a number of WADA issues should be addressed and the EU must turn its attention to. These are: the review of WADA’s International Standards and Code, the election of the new representatives of the EU in the WADA Foundation Board and the co-ordination of EU’s position for the WADA’s meeting in November. Besides that, emphasis will be given

to the rising threat of recreational doping and to the continuity of the discussion started by the Danish Presidency.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the fact that sport has its own sub-programme within "ERASMUS FOR ALL" Programme with its own budget. This is expected to strengthen sport's social role, as well as support Grass roots sports. These issues are expected to be discussed extensively during the EU Sport Forum, the Informal Ministerial Meeting and finally the Sport Directors Meeting.

Dear President, Dear MPs

The fields of education, youth, culture, audiovisual and sport are important components for the economic development and the social cohesion of the European Union and for the welfare of its citizens. The Cyprus Presidency will give emphasis on the social dimension of these policy areas, while promoting the implementation of the "Europe 2020" Strategy.

At this point I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the other two Member States of our trio, Poland and Denmark. Together we started the preparation for the assumption of the important task of the Presidency of the European Union, on the basis of trying to best serve the interests of all our partners in the Union. The cooperation was close and the efforts were continuous. Being the last member of the Trio, we hope to accomplish in the best way possible this joint effort, meeting everyone's expectations.

In particular I would like to express our readiness to work closely and honestly with the European Parliament.

Thank you.