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Meeting between the Troika of the Education Council and social partners, Brussels, 14 November 2007

Speech by Heikki Suomalainen, Chairman of BUSINESSEUROPE Education & Training Working Group

1) INTRODUCTION

Thank you for inviting BUSINESSEUROPE to this meeting prior to the Education Council meeting that will take place tomorrow.

The agenda for the Council foresees several important items for discussion. Without trying to be comprehensive, I will focus the BUSINESSEUROPE message on a few key points for employers.

2) EQF

It is very good news that the European institutions have been able to reach agreement at the stage of first reading and that the text can be adopted by the Council this year,

This illustrates the broad consensus on the objectives and modalities of EQF,

The EQF has already been the catalyst for much activity within Member States, notably its positive impact in stimulating developments regarding National Qualification Frameworks,

The amended timeframe is a welcome change as it provides Member States with a more realistic implementation agenda,

This is important because the national frameworks will ultimately make the EQF more relevant and useful, both for individuals and for companies, and time is needed to develop the necessary processes relating to Quality Assurance and developing mutual trust between systems,

Projects underway to test the EQF also show that time is needed to implement the 'best fit' approach for interpreting and applying the various descriptor levels.

We look forward in participating in the EQF Advisory Body that will accompany the implementation process from 2008.



3) NEW SKILLS FOR NEW JOBS

4) EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS A KEY DRIVER OF THE LISBON STRATEGY

On the proposed draft Council resolutions we have been asked to comment on, I would like to highlight a couple of points.

I would like to firstly draw your attention to the joint analysis of European social partners on the 'key challenges facing European labour markets', which was recently adopted.

This joint analysis forms the basis to decide appropriate joint recommendations to the EU and national institutions to foster the development of more and better jobs. The fundamental message is that this requires a holistic mix of mutually reinforcing economic and social policies.

In today's labour market and in the future, it more than ever necessary to make sure people possess the necessary skills and capacities to adapt to changes, to enter and remain on the labour market and grasp new employment opportunities.

One key element to better match labour supply and demand is to put into place effective active labour market policies – that are complemented with effective lifelong learning strategies that underpin individuals' employability.

- Active labour market policies and education and training
- Social protection systems and social cohesion
- Labour regulation and industrial relations
- Flexicurity (employability as employment security – no longer job security)

Financing public employment services is therefore necessary but it also enables greater attention to be paid to the access to training and learning needs of disadvantaged groups – enabling Member States to better exploit their labour market potential.

Developing vocational guidance and mechanisms to better forecast needs, where possible, should also complement lifelong learning strategies.

The updating of skills is dependant on adequate investment in lifelong learning. To maximise effectiveness of spending, responsibility in this needs to be shared between all interested parties (public authorities, enterprises, individuals) through real partnerships.

When we speak of the knowledge triangle (innovation, research, education) and if we also take into account all of the recent attention that has been paid to establishing the EIT, less focus has been on education and training. We therefore fully endorse the view that education and training policies are better synergised with other policy areas.



This will help to give education and training its rightful place in reform programmes and facilitate the realisation of lifelong learning strategies.

We have not been invited to express views on the draft resolution on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness. Having not seen the document, we are unable to comment but BUSINESSEUROPE is very active in the field of higher education and is an associate member of the Bologna Follow Up Group – we would have been happy to share our views with you on this issue.
