



SPEECH

*** Check against delivery ***

18 November 2008

MEETING BETWEEN THE TROIKA OF THE EDUCATION COUNCIL AND SOCIAL PARTNERS, BRUSSELS, 20 NOVEMBER 2008

DINNER ON WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER

SPEECH BY PHILIPPE DE BUCK, BUSINESSEUROPE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Introduction

Dear Ministers, Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here to share with you the views of business on how to improve the delivery of Education and Training systems in Europe.

As we are all aware, the current financial and economic crisis is starting to bite. Unemployment is already starting to rise in some Member States and the most optimistic scenario is that things will start to pick up by the end of 2009 – at least one year from now.

Therefore, it is now as important as ever to focus on reinforcing efficiency and equity in education systems. Investment in Education and Training has never been for rapid results. It is a long-term investment and the standards of quality in education should not be compromised. BUSINESSEUROPE on its side is encouraging that companies maintain high levels of quality in training provision. And here today I address you, the Ministers responsible for education, and urge you to also focus on improving quality of systems.

It is vital for long-term competitiveness and can also be a contributing factor in helping to alleviate the negative effects of a global recession.

European Tools

Maximising efficiency and equity is partly about increasing the transparency of qualifications. I would like to congratulate the Commission on the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

To become reality, the EQF depends on national frameworks to become operational and comparable. This will take time. These tools are designed to bring education systems closer to the needs and realities of labour markets. We therefore underline that the process must involve national social partners.

Realising the EQF depends on developing mutual trust between systems. The Commission's Recommendation on Quality Assurance will help. The ECVET Recommendation is designed to stimulate mobility within and between countries.

These are important developments that will help improve European competitiveness. The implementation of these tools must remain voluntary – notably to account for national and sub-national specificities. The next challenge will be to better integrate Higher Education into these frameworks.

Revised European strategy Education and Training 2009-

The development of these European tools is a very valuable product of the present cooperation in the Open Method of Coordination. A revision of the European Strategy for Education and Training is underway but while there is room for improvement, the existing framework should largely be maintained.

The flexicurity debate highlights that the interface between employment and education policies needs to be reinforced. We are therefore pleased that the Commission is also taking steps in this direction and we look forward to seeing the forthcoming Communication on '*New Skills for New Jobs*'.

Demographic ageing and shrinking of the working age population will soon start to have an impact on the economy. It will be increasingly important to improve the matching of supply and demand on the labour market and to increase employment rates over and beyond the current Lisbon target of 70%.

Bordeaux Communiqué

We are pleased to see that one of the four key priorities of the Communiqué is to reinforce links between education and the labour market. We must work together to facilitate transitions on the labour market and to reinforce adaptability and reactivity to change.

With the other European Social Partner organisations we have also in October 2007 produced a joint analysis of labour market challenges – and joint recommendations on how to tackle them.



This landmark document is rightly referred to in the text of the Bordeaux Communiqué and we urge you to take stock of it for your work.

Our joint analysis underlines the need to evolve from a Job for life logic to an employment security mindset. Managing transitions, putting in place retraining programmes and reinforcing guidance are therefore key elements to implementing genuine lifelong learning strategies. We are pleased to note that these important topics will also be debated tomorrow.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reinforcing efficiency and equity involves making best use of resources. This necessitates the implicit involvement of social partners at all levels. Such frameworks are crucial to establishing the shared responsibility of all actors for developing individuals' employability. It is a common goal.

BUSINESSEUROPE looks forward to 2009 as the European Year for Innovation and Creativity – and we are ready to contribute in this project. We also look forward to the Czech Presidency programme – which has identified as a priority to reinforce partnerships between schools and companies.
