



SPEECH

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INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING ON THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS, BORDEAUX, 26 NOVEMBER 2008

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SESSION 2 – NEW SKILLS FOR NEW JOBS

Wednesday 26 November, Palais des Congrès de Bordeaux

Introduction

Dear Ministers, Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are all aware, the current financial and economic crisis is starting to bite. Unemployment is already rising 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.

The economic crisis should not lead us to lose sight of long-term challenges, such as demographic ageing.

The resulting shrinking of the working age population will soon start to have an impact on the economy. CEDEFOP's forecast shows that the working age population will fall by around 6 million by 2020. We need now to improve the matching of supply and demand on the labour market and to increase employment rates beyond the Lisbon target of 70% - even up to 75%.

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. I ask you, the Ministers responsible for education, to also continue to focus on improving quality of systems.

It is vital for long-term competitiveness and can also be a contributing factor in increasing productivity, which will be crucial to ensure future prosperity in the face of population ageing.

As I only have 3 minutes, I will focus on a few key messages:

The Bordeaux Communiqué comes at an important stage of the process. It permits us to take stock of 6 years of cooperation under the Copenhagen Process where we can say very positive things – such as the implementation of the EQF.

However, the Lisbon targets, that remain as valid today as in 2000, are still out of reach and the current economic context presents additional challenges.

One of the four key priorities of the Communiqué is to reinforce links between education and the labour market. We must indeed work together to facilitate transitions on the labour market and to reinforce adaptability and reactivity to change. Such frameworks are crucial to establishing the shared responsibility of all actors for developing individuals' employability. It is a common goal.

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 - '*New Skills for New Jobs*'.

With the other European Social Partner organisations we have 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 Bordeaux Communiqué and we urge you to take stock of it.

It 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 central to genuine lifelong learning strategies.

Measures to improve the anticipation of skills needs and quality assurance necessitate greater involvement of the social partners at all levels, especially where such partnerships are lacking. Individualised training pathways with more permeability between VET and higher education, as highlighted in the Communiqué and the universities' Charter on lifelong learning, should be a priority for policy makers.

Maximising efficiency and equity is partly about increasing the transparency of qualifications. The EQF and subsequent tools are designed to stimulate mobility and to bring education systems closer to the needs and realities of labour markets. We therefore underline that the process must be voluntary to take into account national / local specificities. Realising the European tools depends on developing mutual trust between systems.

Conclusion

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.