European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the Europe 2020 strategy

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PURPOSE: to give a new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) to support the Europe 2020 strategy.

BACKGROUND: the quality of human capital is crucial for Europe's success. VET must play a dual role: as a tool to help meet Europe's immediate and future skills needs; and, in parallel, to reduce the social impact of and facilitate recovery from the crisis. These twin challenges call for urgent reforms. The case for better skills development[1] in Europe is even more urgent in the light of the global race for talent and rapid development of Education and Training (E&T) systems in emerging economies such as China, Brazil or India.

Initial vocational education and training (IVET) must equip young learners with skills directly relevant to evolving labour markets, such as e-skills, and highly developed key competences; such as digital and media literacy to achieve digital competence ; it has a particular role to play in addressing Europe's high youth unemployment. In addition, as the traditional life sequence of "training-work-retirement" will be modified with mid-life changes of careers and occupations, adults must be able to update their skills and competences through **continuing vocational education and training (CVET)**.

The EU Ministers in charge of VET, European Social Partners and the European Commission will review the priorities under the Copenhagen process in December 2010.

European cooperation in VET so far has been successful, particularly in the establishment of a number of EU common tools to enhance transparency and portability of qualifications. However, the agenda set in Europe 2020 clearly calls for a **much bolder approach to reforms of VET systems**.

The re-launch of European cooperation in VET at the end of 2010 should be the result of a close partnership between Member States, the Commission and the Social Partners. It should comprise the **definition of priorities for the coming 10 years, with shorter term objectives to be regularly reviewed** by the stakeholders. This Communication constitutes the contribution of the Commission to the agenda for the modernisation of VET in the EU and provides policy responses to support the Europe 2020 Strategy.

CONTENT: the aim of this Communication is therefore to propose a vision for the future of VET. It builds on and contributes to the Europe 2020 strategy and the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020. It also takes into account the EU's renewed social agenda and the EU Strategy for Youth.

This communication outlines several possible ways to give VET a new impetus:

(1) A key role of VET in lifelong learning and mobility: the key actions in VET to support lifelong learning and mobility should focus on:

- flexible "à la carte" concepts to maximise the access to continuing VET delivered by employers, traditional training providers and higher education institutions and coupled with appropriate financial incentives;
- genuinely open pathways from VET to HE and development of tertiary VET programmes;
- high degree of validation of non-formal and informal learning;

- integrated guidance and counselling services to facilitate transitions and learning and career choices;
- by 2020, systematic use of EQF, ECVET and Europass aimed at transparency of qualifications and portability of learning outcomes;
- transnational mobility strategies at the level of VET providers facilitated by appropriate mobility support structures.

(2) Increasing attractiveness and excellence of VET through quality and efficiency: the key actions to improve the quality and efficiency of initial and continuing VET should aim at:

- implementing quality assurance systems at national level, as recommended by EQAVET framework;
- developing a competence framework for teachers and trainers in initial and continuing VET;
- providing the workforce with high quality labour market relevant vocational skills by increased use of different forms of work-based learning;
- strengthening the development of key competences to ensure the adaptability and flexibility of learners and workers;
- making VET provision more responsive to evolving labour market needs based on forward planning tools in cooperation with social partners and public employment services.

(3) Equity and active citizenship: initial VET can contribute significantly to combat drop outs, improve educational equity and promote upward social mobility of groups at risk by:

- providing high quality training focused on work-based learning adapted to individual needs;
- pathways from VET to HE accessible to groups at risk;
- appropriate "tracer systems" to monitor the employment rates of VET students, in particular of those belonging to groups at risk.

Continuing VET is particularly well placed to increase the labour market participation of groups at risk through:

- flexible and modularised individual learning pathways;
- work-based learning focused on the acquisition of key competences;
- guidance services and validation of prior learning, particularly for migrants in order to facilitate their integration into society.

With a view to development of the key competences for active citizenship:

- partnerships between VET providers, local communities, civil society organisations, parents and learners should be strengthened.

(4) Innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship: VET can support creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship of learners by:

- providing experience-based and active learning to promote the acquisition of e-skills, a risk-taking culture, initiative, curiosity, intrinsic motivation and the critical thinking of individuals;
- including entrepreneurship in the competence framework of VET teachers and trainers.