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EUROCADRES' opinion on EU 2020

1) EUROCADRES general position on EU 2020:

The Commission working document on EU 2020 is a promising starting point. The major challenges of the European Union and some replies to them are well listed in this short draft strategy.

EUROCADRES shares the Commission opinion that the economic and employment crisis, globalisation, environmental and climate questions, level of knowledge and skills in Europe, sustainability of public finances and aging are those major challenges which we shall be faced with.

The three key priorities of the draft strategy, i.e. "1) Creating value by basing growth on knowledge, 2) Empowering people in inclusive societies and 3) Creating a competitive connected and greener economy" are skillfully selected. It is delightful that the inclusive society is playing the key role in this context.

EUROCADRES also supports the general goals of the strategy (social market economy, competitiveness etc), but the exact formulation of this "ideological" aim of the EU should be the following: Europe has to be a social and environmentally-friendly market economy which is based on knowledge and competitiveness with a human face.

2) In addition to these general views, EUROCADRES would like to underline, in particular, the following messages:

a) There must be a balance between different key pillars of the EU 2020 strategy. Social, environmental, knowledge and economic pillars are equal and complementary. The approach of the EU 2020 document is somewhat better and more balanced than the view of the revised Lisbon strategy of 2005 in which other pillars became subordinate to competitiveness.

b) Education, research and innovations have to remain key priorities and the EU 2020 document is completely on the right track. Cutting spending in these areas would be preposterous and undermine the possibilities for a new economic rise and competitiveness. Education has a double task. It creates opportunities for employability and strengthens competitiveness. On the other hand, it has a cultural task in "creating" inclusive societies and enlightened citizens. That should be recognized also in the EU 2020 strategy. Education is not only university-studies, but also vocational training and all type of training and education that takes place in workplaces and educational institutions.

c) The balance between flexibility and security in change has to be underlined. This vital balance is mentioned in the strategy, but there is no reference at all to security provided by the quality of jobs. The quality of jobs underpinned by minimum labour standards and collective agreements is a key component for higher productivity and creativity. A new EU Social Agenda with a number of concrete actions is needed as soon as possible.

d) Europe has to be open to the world and remain non-protectionist internally as well. Excessive barriers for trade and for free movement of technology and knowledge would be detrimental to employment in the EU. Free movement of people in the internal market is a right to which the European citizens are entitled, but the recognition of skills and competences has still to be developed and furthered. State subsidies distort fair competition and “export” unemployment from one State to another. On the other hand, fair and equal conditions are needed through minimum safety and other standards. Europe needs its own model for strong responsibility and management.

e) Europe must be the champion of global governance: foster stronger labour, financial, environmental and safety standards and multilateral institutions around the globe. A strong global economic, monetary and competition policy co-operation is also needed and the EU has to show leadership.

f) Greening of the economy is rightly a key priority in the draft strategy. It would be advisable to underline also the necessary greening of the labor market. New jobs, restructuring necessitated and brought about by climate change, smarter and eco-efficient ways of working, the higher level of skills needed by employees due to this green transformation and so on will thoroughly change the current labour markets. All the jobs have to become environmentally-friendly; Europe can be a winner in this transformation, if a progressive approach is chosen.

g) One of the biggest challenges is the demography in Europe and the possible lack of qualified workforce in the long run. This could call for activities that would make it attractive for workers to stay in the labour market longer instead of retirement e.g. changed working hours, improved payment to pensions if you stay longer and so on.

3) *EUROCADRES* would also like to draw attention to the following ideas and proposals:

-The priorities of EU 2020 have to be reflected in the EU budget. The share of education, research and innovation funds has to be doubled from the beginning of the new budget period (2013 onwards).

-The second key driver "Empowering people in inclusive societies" should mention the social dialogue.

-The ideas of EU 2020 concerning universities and higher education can largely be supported. However, the vocational education and the other higher education institutes (*Polytechnics, Grandes écoles, Fachhochschulen, Yrkeshögskola* etc.) should not be ignored. They are not at all mentioned.

-The proposal of benchmarking European universities against the best universities in the world demands a system which is not based on a narrow set of simplistic indicators, but on a comprehensive view and understanding of the European educational system and its values. It is not so that only some few top-class educational performances are of importance, but also a high general level and a good quality of education.

-Greater mobility and “5th freedom” (free circulation of people, knowledge and technology) can be supported. This requires a strong increase in the funding of relevant EU programmes.

- Regarding the statement (page 6) "In fact, new patterns are emerging where there are several entries in and exits from the labour market during a working life, instead of traditional sequence education, work and retirement", those patterns are may be more common and widespread than in the past, but definitely not a new phenomenon.

4) Consultation process and governance of EU 2020

EUROCADRES supports the idea that the European Council should fix a small number of headline objectives. The few EMU criteria could serve as an efficient model.

The employment rate, energy saving, the growth of the GNP together with qualitative aspects of life, work and environment are relevant examples.

It is very positive that this kind of open consultation process is organised and the partnership approach is a basis for EU 2020. Without clear commitments of all key players - including the social partners -, the successful implementation of the strategy is not feasible or possible. Unfortunately, the draft document is more positive than the beginning of the consultation process. There has been a very short time for replies and in this way, it is difficult to organise any comprehensive national or European hearings and debates.