

JEAN MONNET CONFERENCE
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MAIN CONCLUSIONS

"The role of education and training in the new European economy"

The starting point to this question must surely lie in the recognition of human resources as the European Union's main asset. Investment in education and training is widely acknowledged to be a crucial factor for competitiveness, sustainable growth and employment strategies and therefore a prerequisite in accomplishing the economic and social objectives set in the Lisbon treaty for the European Union. For this reason, education and training must be placed high among national priorities. Education and training must be the key drivers for the setting up and development of the new sustainable, knowledge-based and socially responsible economic model. Education, if accessible to all citizens, is therefore the best possible social policy in that it provides especially the best way to pursue sustained economic recovery while preserving social cohesion in times of economic downturn.

Education and training should not be perceived only as key drivers for economy recovery but also as building and cohesive elements for preparing the future and responding to the global challenges, which includes acknowledging our great diversity and democratic shared values. Therefore, strengthening investment in education and training at a European level might be an effort worth considering.

The **first priority** is the further enhancement of education and training in Europe through the development of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation. Boosting education is the most effective way of fighting inequality and poverty. Preventing early school leaving reduces the threat of future exclusion from the labour market. Greater emphasis on vulnerable group, gender equality and social cohesion is needed to ensure that no one is excluded from knowledge.

Strategic challenges in this area are:

- *Lifelong learning and mobility.* Lifelong learning is essential to ensure transition between jobs and occupations, and in avoiding long-term unemployment leading to loss of human capital.
- *Quality and efficiency.* This includes investment in higher-quality education, research and development, technology, innovation, modernizing existing structures and skills development.
- *Active citizenship and equity.* Social dimension, equity, social cohesion and active citizenship are decisive for the social legitimacy of Europe.
- *Creativity and Innovation.* Knowledge is the engine for sustainable growth. Europe needs to provide a more favourable environment for innovation and creativity.

The **second priority** is the need for further enhancement of the links between higher education institutions and the world of work (social and economic partners). The mission of higher education is the generation of knowledge and research, but it should also ensure that society receives the benefits from these activities.

Europe has some of the best universities in the world. The development of the European Area of Higher Education constitutes the new framework for the construction of the European Area of Knowledge. The internationalisation of higher education institutions is an essential part of the EHEA and strongly contributes to enhance diversity, mobility and quality. An efficient, effective, and well-resourced European Research Area is an indispensable part of the EU 2020 vision. Europe needs to increase its research efforts by pooling resources, jointly developing major research infrastructures across the EU and raising research quality to world leading standards. Society as a whole will benefit from the circulation of knowledge and technology.

In order to ensure the implementation of the common objectives, it will be important to promote higher, more efficient and targeted investment at national level, as well as through EU financing instruments, in particular the 2007-2013 Lifelong Learning Programme and its successor, and the European Social Fund. In this respect, it is right to place strong emphasis on the promotion of learning mobility and on the free circulation of people and knowledge as part of the vision for a European Knowledge Area.

ON THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

While competences in education and training remain at national level, cooperation at European level has made considerable progress over the last decade in identifying and addressing common challenges and developing the exchange of experience and good practice. Specific areas of progress include continuing to promote the acquisition of key competences for all and expanding partnerships between education institutions and the world of work, but above all emphasise the need to follow up the new Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training adopted in 2009¹, and in particular its four strategic objectives.

In the overall governance of the new EU 2020 strategy, monitoring progress will be crucial. Thus, the European benchmarks agreed under the Framework, should be duly taken into account, in order to achieve the objectives set.

¹ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009.