

Letter from: Hannelore Kraft, President of the German Bundesrat

To: Mr Barroso

Date: Berlin, 18 March 2011

Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving

COM (2011) 19 final

In its 881st sitting on 18 March 2011 the Bundesrat decided to transmit to the Commission the decision attached hereto.

[Complimentary close]

18.03.11**Decision****of the Bundesrat**
-----**Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving**

COM(2011) 19 final

At its 881st meeting on 18 March 2011, in accordance with Articles 3 and 5 of the EUZBLG (Law on Cooperation between the Federation and the Länder in European Union Affairs), the Bundesrat adopted the following opinion:

1. The Commission notes that the Member States undertook to establish national targets to reduce early school leaving as part of the Europe 2020 strategy, taking account of their relative starting positions and national circumstances. The Bundesrat recalls, in addition, that the European Council likewise pointed out that it is a matter for the Member States to establish and put into effect quantitative aims in the area of education and that country-specific recommendations must not affect the powers of the Member States, for example, in areas such as education.
2. The Bundesrat points out that under the Europe 2020 strategy the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany agreed with the Bund (Federation) upon the joint aim of reducing the rate of early school leavers to less than 10 percent of 18 to 24 year olds. According to the EU definition adopted in 2003, early school leavers are those persons who have not completed upper secondary education and have no further education and training.
3. The Bundesrat calls to mind that the Bund and the Länder set targets to reduce the early school leaving rate and took varied measures in that regard well before the Europe 2020 strategy was adopted, for example under the initiative for qualification in Germany *Aufstieg durch Bildung* ('Advancement through education') Tackling early school leaving is thus an (education) policy priority in Germany on which, in particular, the Länder (responsible for education in schools) have been focusing their efforts for many years. Since 2000, Germany has succeeded in steadily lowering the early school leaving rate.
4. Like the Commission, the Bundesrat takes the view that prevention, intervention and compensatory measures ought to complement each other and that comprehensive strategies to tackle early school leaving can be an important tool for successful policy formulation. Insofar as the Commission calls upon the Member States to adopt such strategies on the basis of a common European framework, the Bundesrat points out that strategies reflecting the Commission's proposals already exist in many Member States, in the context of the respective regional conditions,. What counts, therefore, is not whether such strategies were prepared by the Member States as a result of the Europe 2020

strategy or on the basis of a common European framework, but rather whether or not those strategies are suitable for reducing the early school leaving rate within the next decade.

5. Because the significance and necessity of a common strategy to tackle early school leaving was already recognised by the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Länder adopted a common support strategy at the education ministers' conference in March 2010. Under that strategy the Länder agreed upon measures to strengthen individual support, restructure learning, facilitate acquisition of a school-leaving certificate, connect partners, strengthen quality assurance and development and step up educational research. These measures are designed to increase the chances of completing school and successful participation in professional and social life for all students.

6. Bund, Länder and industry also agreed in October 2010 to extend the successful Training Pact until 2014. This Pact pursues the objective of improving the level of education and vocational guidance, supporting weaker young people more intensively, placing them in training in a more targeted manner, structuring the transitional system more efficiently and improving the available data. Thus, young people who previously had difficulties in making the transition to training should be increasingly taken into account.

7. The Bundesrat agrees with the Commission that education reforms take time to have effect. Since early school leaving is, as a rule, a process rather than an isolated event, the success of measures to reduce early school leaving can, at best, become evident in the medium term. In view of the Commission's stated intention to report periodically on the progress towards the Europe 2020 target on early school leaving through the Annual Growth Survey, the Bundesrat warns against harbouring unrealistic expectations for progress within a year. The Commission and the Member States are right to set a quantitative target for reducing early school leaving which should take effect within ten years.

8. The Bundesrat is also of the opinion that early school leaving is a complex problem which cannot be solved having regard only to education. Like the Commission, the Bundesrat therefore sees a need for cooperation between a large number of stakeholders in the area of education, young people, society and employment. As regards education, it is worth paying greater attention to pre-school and non-formal education and even to include non-formal and informal education processes. Whereas in this respect early-childhood education is decisive for success at school, since this period has a critical impact on the whole of a child's later educational path, non-formal education is of considerable importance in developing personality, the ability to take an active part in society and thus also for entering the employment market.

9. The Bundesrat acknowledges with interest the Commission's analysis that the causes of early school leaving differ widely from country to country and also within regions. It welcomes the Commission's conclusion that policies to reduce early school leaving need to be adjusted to the specific situation within a region or country and that there is no single solution for all Member States. A single EU strategy to reduce early school leaving would therefore not be effective or admissible in the light of the scheme of powers under the Treaty and the subsidiarity principle. Considering the manifold causes and the different circumstances in the Member States, schematic solutions are therefore ruled out; instead, tailor-made concepts are necessary which can take into account individual needs on the spot.

10. Owing to the complexity of the problem, the different situations in the Member States and the responsibility of the Member States for structuring their education systems, only the Member States themselves can decide which measures should be adopted under a strategy, which stakeholders to include and whether strategies which already exist render unnecessary the adoption of a new strategy on the basis of a European framework. These circumstances should be taken into account in developing a European framework.

11. In the view of the Bundesrat, the Commission's assessment that students in some Member States who have encountered difficulties in general education often go into vocational training does not apply to Germany. The vocational training system in Germany does not focus its efforts on weaker students but aims to provide high-quality vocational qualifications and secure a constant supply of skilled employees. In particular, the dual system in initial vocational training in Germany makes it possible for students to gain early insights into the labour market and thus makes the transition from school to employment considerably easier. General education and vocational training are therefore both called upon to make a contribution to reducing the early school leaving rate.

12. The Bundesrat shares the Commission's view that evidence-based educational research is the basis of a more cost-effective and efficient education policy and that this requires gathering and evaluating relevant data. The Bundesrat points out, however, that such gathering of data should be proportionate to the administrative burden to which it gives rise and that the gathering and use of certain data may be hindered by provisions of data protection law.

13. From the point of view of the administrative burden, the Bundesrat welcomes the Commission's proposal, for reporting on national measures to reduce early school leaving, to draw upon the existing reporting mechanism of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020).

14. Insofar as the Commission intends to channel the use of EU funding instruments and to include measures which support the reduction of early school leaving rates in absolutely all specific EU actions for children and young adults, the Bundesrat points out that tackling early school leaving is an extremely important area but is not, however, the only objective of education policy. In particular, the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme must not be subordinated solely to the attainment of the Europe 2020 strategy objectives, but the Member States must retain sufficient scope for action in order to pursue other education policy objectives as well.

15. Like the Commission, the Bundesrat assumes that factors such as the duration of compulsory education and the provision of school and vocational training opportunities may have an impact on the rate of early school leavers. The Bundesrat rejects across-the-board calls for extending compulsory education irrespective of its current duration or for providing education and training guarantees beyond the age of compulsory education, even as exemplary actions.

16. Due account shall be taken of this opinion in accordance with Articles 3 and 5 of the EUZBLG. This matter relates primarily to general school education and therefore concerns the exclusive legislative powers of the Länder.

17. The negotiations shall be conducted by a representative of the Länder in accordance with Articles 3 and 5 of the EUZBLG.

18. The Bundesrat shall transmit this opinion directly to the Commission.