



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 8-8-2013  
C(2013) 5326 final

*Dear President,*

*The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion concerning the Commission Communication “Rethinking Education” {COM(2012) 669 final} and apologises for the delay in replying.*

*The Opinion rightly notes that the Communication takes account of the improvements European education systems have achieved and the efforts that are being made at the national level to respond to the challenges brought about by technological advances and other societal change.*

*It is true that these improvements have not yet succeeded in fully addressing the challenge of underperformance and low achievement, skills mismatch, nor the lack of specific strategies to support the development of transversal skills, including entrepreneurial skills. The Commission has provided an extensive overview of the various national situations in the accompanying Staff Working Document “Country Analysis” which also gives an indication of the reasons why different Member States are undertaking different reforms. Each education system is different and Member States themselves are best placed to address the national shortcomings, as your Opinion rightly states.*

*On the basis of information gathered through research, the Communication analyses and gives concrete suggestions for a limited number of strategic priorities to be addressed by Member States, alongside new EU actions to leverage national efforts. The priorities reflect the Country Specific Recommendations, which the Commission made to a number of Member States in support of the Annual Growth Survey 2012.*

*Learning to learn is a competence that the Communication recognises as important. It is crucial to support teachers in developing methods which will help learners acquire and use this competence effectively. The accompanying Staff Working Document “Assessment of Key Competences in initial education and training: Policy Guidance” gives examples of successfully developed teaching strategies for this key competence.*

*Mr Valeriu Ștefan ZGONEA  
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*The Camera Deputaţilor also rightly notes that national education systems respond to new challenges individually and not necessarily in the same manner. This is their prerogative; education and training are the competence of Member States, and while the European level actions are in place to support them and enable peer exchange, they are not prescriptive.*

*The Commission's focus in the present Communication reflects the context of the current economic situation and high youth unemployment in Europe. Emphasis is placed on delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders to tackle both short- and long-term challenges. This is not in contradiction with the broader mission of education and training which encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being. In fact, social and economic independence is an important condition for leading a self-fulfilled life.*

*The Commission believes that an approach that shifts the emphasis from 'doing better' to 'doing it differently', as the Camera Deputaţilor suggests, is present in the Communication and its Staff Working Documents. The Communication does not prescribe one single policy approach. Ample information is given on concrete examples of reforms and proposals for further rethinking which can serve as tools for individual Member States to explore the possibilities and willingness for further reforms. In some systems which already perform quite well, reforms needed might be only partial, while, for some others, a revision of the paradigm might in fact be needed.*

*The Commission believes that sharing good practice and enabling Member States to exchange experience through various channels – including the Open Method of Coordination, and the funding opportunities included in the forthcoming Erasmus for All programme as proposed by the Commission – will give countries that need to catch up the possibility to do so.*

*Educational reform concerns all world regions. Indeed, it is the global supply of an increasingly skilled workforce and the simultaneous demographic change that is particularly putting Europe to the test. Europe cannot find appropriate solutions without taking account of developments elsewhere. These and other new social realities are driving the need for change.*

*The Camera Deputaţilor rightly notes that the advance of technology poses new societal challenges that education needs to address adequately. In this context, the Commission is working on a new initiative "Opening up Education". Its key objective is to strengthen the integration of digital technologies and contents, including open educational resources (OER), in order to stimulate innovation in learning for a greater provision of skills needed and increased efficiency of the delivery of education and training. What the Commission expects to achieve is not only to improve and update digital infrastructures for education and training, including connectivity, but also to up-scale the creation, use, and sharing of quality digital education contents, including OER, as well as to modernise learning, teaching and assessment practices through digital technologies while increasing equity.*

*Regarding the assessment of learning outcomes, assessment should always have the purpose of supporting learning, widening access to further learning opportunities and allowing learners to show their knowledge, skills and competences to the outside world, including to employers. While national level assessment is the responsibility of Member States, cooperation at the European level improves the transparency, recognition and comparability*

*of skills and qualifications, and thus enables people to be mobile and to pursue further education or employment opportunities also abroad. That is the aim of the European Area for Skills and Qualifications, to be launched in 2015, as announced in "Rethinking Education".*

*Teachers' roles are changing with regard to the skills they are asked to teach, reflecting, among other things, new ICT developments as well as new delivery methods. Therefore, teachers should be given support for continuous professional development throughout their careers. The Commission agrees that learning environments should encourage student engagement and motivation, be sensitive to individual differences, ensure that learning is social and collaborative, provide formative feedback, promote connections across activities and subjects, and are demanding without overloading students.*

*Regarding languages, the Staff Working Document "Language competences for employability, mobility and growth" shows the interest and the clear need for better knowledge of foreign languages among Europeans. In order to be able to seize the opportunities that EU citizenship provides in terms of freedom of movement throughout Europe, language skills are crucial. Language knowledge also boosts the level of intercultural understanding which is one important aspect of living in an increasingly inter-connected world.*

*As regards spending for education and training, the Commission puts forward efficiency as one of its key messages in "Rethinking Education", which implies the need to improve coordination between the different actors, and partnerships with external stakeholders. The Commission calls on Member States to initiate national debates with relevant stakeholders on ways to increase the efficiency of spending.*

*The Commission shares the view that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are crucial for successful lifelong learning. The Commission supports efforts at the national level to improve the quality of ECEC provision. Minimum requirements might include structural requirements, such as health and safety standards, infrastructure, child/staff ratios, staff qualifications, staff salaries, curriculum standards, and requirements concerning the social environment, governance issues, and child outcomes (cognitive, social, emotional and physical).<sup>1</sup>*

*The Commission agrees that the role of the family in supporting the individual from the earliest age is not to be neglected. Although "Rethinking Education" does not focus on this area, the Commission addresses this question through its social policy approaches, such as the European Platform for Investing in Children<sup>2</sup>.*

*As concerns professional counselling, this is a task which needs to be tackled seriously by public administrations, education and training institutions, and employers. The Commission is doing its utmost to support them, for example through the EU Skills Panorama. Within the context of the proposal for future "Erasmus for All" programme, support will be given to Knowledge Alliances to enable sharing, exchange and flow of knowledge between higher education institutions and enterprises. In the Vocational Education and Training (VET) area, funding will be provided to Sector Skills Alliances, uniting training institutions, enterprises and professional organisations, to design curricula and training programmes.*

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<sup>1</sup> Education and Training Monitor 2012, SWD(2012)373 final.

<sup>2</sup> <http://europa.eu/epic/>

*The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the comments and concerns raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing this constructive political dialogue in the future.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Maroš Šefčovič  
Vice-President*