



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 27.2.2019
C(2019) 115 final*

*Mr Liviu DRAGNEA
President of the
Camera Deputaților
Palace of the Parliament
Str. Izvor nr. 2-4, sector 5
RO – 050563 BUCHAREST*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion concerning the proposal for a Council Recommendation on High quality early childhood education and care systems {COM(2018) 271 final}. The Commission welcomes the Camera Deputaților's support for the development of the European Education Area, in general, and inclusive early childhood education and care, in particular.

The proposed Recommendation supports Member States in their efforts to allow all children to have the best possible start in life and achieve their full potential. The Recommendation needs to be set in the context of principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that 'Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality'. The Commission is pleased that the incoming Romanian Presidency plans to negotiate the Recommendation in Council and aims to have it adopted during its term.

The Commission shares the position of the Camera Deputaților regarding the importance of ensuring the right work-life balance. In its Communication on an 'Initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers'¹, the Commission recognises that improving the quality, affordability and access to childcare services has a positive impact on female participation in the labour market. Already the Barcelona European Council in 2002 called for continued efforts to address 'barriers and disincentives for female labour force participation, by inter alia, improving the provision of childcare facilities'². According to Eurofound, women with a child under seven do on

¹ COM(2017) 252 final.

² Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002.

average more than 20 hours more unpaid work a week than men³. Furthermore, as underlined by a study published in 2017 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on 'The Pursuit of Gender Equality', supporting access to affordable and quality childcare can alleviate some of this burden and thereby greatly support women in engaging in paid work⁴.

The Commission agrees that research offers valuable findings on childcare and child psychology. It uses the results of European Union funded projects such as CARE⁵, ISOTIS⁶ and INTESYS⁷, with a view to supporting policy developments in the field.

The Commission also acknowledges that statistics resulting from surveys from the Programme for International Student Assessment should always be interpreted with due care, taking national particularities and individual circumstances into account. However, evidence from its 2015 report shows that in almost all Member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 15-year-olds who had access to early childhood education and care outperformed in mathematics compared to students who had not had access to early childhood education and care.

Furthermore, the Commission shares the view of the Camera Deputaţilor that the social integration of children from disadvantaged backgrounds must not be confined to the field of early childhood education and care, but should be mainstreamed across a wider range of policies. The Commission has developed integrated strategies, in accordance with its recommendation on 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'⁸, encompassing various subjects related to children's wellbeing, such as improving the responsiveness of health systems to address the needs of disadvantaged children or providing children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment.

As regards the need to reflect more strongly childcare needs in European Union public health policies, the Commission notes that healthy diets and regular physical activity are very important in early childhood care. Children are our most vulnerable citizens and they should grow up in environments offering healthy options rather than aggressive (online) marketing of unhealthy foods.

The Commission also welcomes the recommendation of the Camera Deputaţilor to foster the exchange of experiences and best practices amongst Member States, and is pleased to announce that a new working group is being set up within the Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020 to discuss high quality early childhood education and care systems. This group will meet for 18 months as of November 2018 and will focus on quality, staff professional development and inclusion.

³ Eurofound (2017), Sixth European Working Conditions Survey

⁴ OECD (2017), The Pursuit of Gender Equality, an Uphill Battle;
<http://www.oecd.org/publications/the-pursuit-of-gender-equality-9789264281318-en.htm>

⁵ <http://ecec-care.org/>

⁶ <http://www.isotis.org/>

⁷ <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/intesys>

⁸ COM(2013) 112 final.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Tibor Navracsics
Member of the Commission*