EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

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☐ *Other, please specify:*

Main area(s) covered by your contribution:

☐ *Economic and financial affairs*

☐ *Competitiveness*

☐ *Industry*

☐ *Single market*

☒ *Employment*

☒ *Research, development and innovation*

☐ *Digital economy*

☐ *Climate, energy and resource efficiency*

☒ *Education*

☒ *Poverty/social exclusion*

☐ *Other, please specify:*

Register ID number (if you/your organisation is registered in the Transparency register): 45445593026-68

Your reply:

☒ *can be published with your personal information*

☐ *can be published in an anonymous way*

☐ *cannot be published*

A) Background for the public consultation:

The Europe 2020 strategy was launched in March 2010 as the EU's strategy for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It aims to achieve a knowledge-based, competitive European economy while preserving the EU's social market economy model and improving resource efficiency. It was thus conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States driven by the promotion of growth and jobs.

The Europe 2020 strategy is built around five headline targets in the areas of employment, research and development, climate and energy[1], education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The strategy also set out a series of action programmes, called "flagship initiatives", in seven fields considered to be key drivers for growth, namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty and resource efficiency. The objectives of the strategy are also supported by action at EU level in areas such as the single market, the EU budget and the EU external agenda.

The Europe 2020 strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the European Semester, the yearly cycle of coordination of economic and budgetary policies at EU level. The European Semester involves discussion among EU institutions on broad priorities,

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[1] In January 2014 the Commission launched a framework for energy and climate policies up to 2030. A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below the 1990 level, an EU-wide binding target for renewable energy of at least 27% and renewed ambitions for energy efficiency policies are among the main objectives of the new framework.

annual commitments by the Member States and country-specific recommendations prepared by the Commission and endorsed at the highest level by leaders in the European Council. These recommendations should then be taken on board in the Member States' policies and budgets. As such, together with the EU budget, the country-specific recommendations are key instruments for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

After four years, the Commission has proposed, and the European Council of 20-21 March 2014 has agreed, to initiate a review of the Europe 2020 strategy. On 5 March 2014, the Commission adopted a Communication "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (Communication 🔲 and Annexes 🔲). drawing preliminary lessons on the first years of implementation of the strategy. Building on these first outcomes and in a context of a gradual recovery of the European economies, it is time to reflect on the design of the strategy for the coming years.

Through these questions, we are seeking your views on the lessons learned from the early years of the Europe 2020 strategy and on the elements to be taken into account in its further development, in order to build the post-crisis growth strategy of the EU.

B) Questions:

1) Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014

Content and implementation

- For you, what does the Europe 2020 strategy mean? What are the main elements that you associate with the strategy?

    The Europe2020 strategy gives political directions to the European Union up to the year 2020. The general priorities, targets and flagship initiatives are the instruments which help to implement the strategy. The most relevant elements for us are the Youth on the Move initiative and the headline target of reaching 40% tertiary attainment by 2020. Connected to those targets we also associate the ET2020 Strategic Framework which plays a crucial role for us and the achievement of general priorities. (See explanation later on in the document)

- Overall, do you think that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference? Please explain.

The Europe2020 strategy had a clear impact on a wide range of issues and in particular on our sector of expertise – Education & Training. The new Erasmus+ programme supports the knowledge triangle (education, research & innovation) and puts additional emphasis on mobility and internationalisation of Higher Education. These two aspects are substantially contributing to reaching the headline targets of EU2020 – 75% employment and poverty reduction and social inclusion. Studies (Erasmus Impact Study, ESNSurveys and others) have shown that especially youth mobility has a great impact on the self-

development of young people (e.g. Erasmus Impact Study: 81% perceive a substantial improvement of their transversal skills) and quality of Education. Additionally it has a very positive impact on employability (labour mobility, labour market relevant skills) and also on the much needed entrepreneurship (e.g. Erasmus Impact Study – 3 out of 4 students are planning to start their own business after having done an Erasmus traineeship abroad). Besides that, mobility has a great impact on active citizenship in regards to participation in democratic processes such as the European Parliament elections (Study: Erasmus Voting Assessment – 81% of students that have completed a stay abroad voted for the EP elections compared to a general turnout of 42.5%) and also influences volunteer involvement of young people (ESNSurvey 2013). Volunteering creates young and active European citizens that benefit from non-formal and informal learning which has a very positive long term impact which is difficult to measure at this stage.

- Has the knowledge of what other EU countries are doing in Europe 2020 areas impacted on the approach followed in your country? Please give examples.

- Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy? Are you involved in the Europe 2020 strategy? Would you like to be more involved? If yes, how?

  Stakeholders are involved through public consultation, which we welcome, but whose impact is difficult to evaluate for the stakeholders involved in the consultation. Stakeholders would appreciate feedback on their consultation. Additionally the European Citizens Initiative has been launched. Unfortunately the collection of 1 Million signatures is very difficult for most topics as previous ECIs have shown. Only ECIs that have the backing through funding from NGOs to be widely promoted are likely to reach such high numbers. We believe that it is very important to implement a structured dialogue for Education as it is done in e.g. the field of youth.

Tools

- Do the current targets for 2020 respond to the strategy's objectives of fostering growth and jobs? [Targets: *to have at least 75% of people aged 20-64 in employment; to invest 3% of GDP in research and development; to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, increase the share of renewables to 20% and improve energy efficiency by 20%; to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and increase the share of young people with a third-level degree or diploma to at least 40%; to ensure at least 20 million fewer people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion*].

The targets can only be seen as indicators and are not sole measures for success to foster growth and jobs. As mentioned earlier, development of young people towards a more European mind-set, more labour relevant skills and entrepreneurship can be reached by youth mobility. The impact is measurable only in a long scale and the quantification is more difficult than with the headline targets. We are happy to see that most of the benchmarks show a development towards reaching the targets. The negative development on the risk of poverty and social exclusion worries us though. Also in Higher Education and youth mobility we see that students with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds need further support and hope that additional measures will be put in place.

- Among current targets, do you consider that some are more important than others? Please explain.

  We believe that to reach the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth all targets are equally important but they need a stronger linkage as they impact each other. A lower rate of early school leaving will have a direct impact on tertiary attainment and level of poverty for example. This relation should also be emphasised further by linking different sectors more and creating additional incentives for collaboration. Different DGs within e.g. the European Commission should be working more closely with each other.

- Do you find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets? If so, what is, in your view, the best way to set national targets? So far, have the national targets been set appropriately/too ambitiously/not ambitiously enough?

  The Open Method of Coordination allows for the so called "blaming and shaming" by giving benchmarks on Country Specific Recommendations. It is definitely a way to put political pressure on all countries. At the same time the CSR seem to be developed with very low involvement of Civil Society. As a result the support from this sector to push for the implementation on National level is not sufficient. To improve this situation, Civil Society should be more involved in the benchmarking and monitoring process. This will give more ownership and put additional political pressure on countries.

- What has been the added value of the seven action programmes for growth? Do you have concrete examples of the impact of such programmes? [*"Flagship initiatives": "Digital agenda for Europe", "Innovation Union", "Youth on the move", "Resource efficient Europe", "An industrial policy for the globalisation era", "Agenda for new skills and jobs", "European platform against poverty"*].

Youth on the Move

ESN was very happy to see Youth on the Move being released in 2011. As we pointed out in our reaction the initiative highlighted several very important aspects of youth and student mobility in Europe, including the problems of recognition of credits taken abroad. Also, some of the proposals such as the "guidance on the European Court of Justice Rulings on the rights of mobile students" were really good. However, the initiative also suffered from some problems; for example, it did not mention anything about the financial obstacles to student mobility, which is unfortunately still a very big problem. Also, in the end we think that some of the bold proposals from Youth on the Move never materialised to the extent which they deserved. The Youth on the Move card and the "mobility scoreboard" can be mentioned as examples of this.

Agenda for new skills and jobs

Regarding "*Agenda for new skills and jobs",* ESN was happy that the Agenda placed a strong emphasis on the topic of education. The Communication (COM(2010) 682 final) correctly identified "Investment in education and training systems" as one of the necessary steps to combat the skills mismatch and, by extension, the alarmingly high unemployment rate. Furthermore, the Agenda mentioned that "The potential of intra-EU mobility and of third-country migrant inflows is not fully utilised" and this is fully in line with what we in ESN believe. Although the very sentence mentioned above refers to mobility in general (i.e. not only student mobility), ESN is also happy that one of the promises in the Agenda is that "The Commission will analyse the best way to support mobility of students (European and international) towards these centres of excellence". ESN is ready to help the Commission with its expertise on the topic of student mobility.

2) Adapting the Europe 2020 strategy: the growth strategy for a post-crisis Europe

Content and implementation

- Does the EU need a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy for growth and jobs for the coming years?

The economic crisis and constant high youth unemployment all over Europe call for a medium-term strategy for growth and jobs in Europe. With limited competences in the field of education, the EU needs to take full advantage of existing successful programmes such as Erasmus to further foster active citizenship, political participation, labour mobility, entrepreneurship, a European identity and tolerance. The impact of staggering unemployment rates is tremendous and the recent xenophobic and racist developments in many member states are symptom of these. Only through a medium-term strategy until 2020 can we solve the issue.

- What are the most important and relevant areas to be addressed in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

Youth unemployment needs to be tackled as soon as possible. There are few short-term initiatives which will have a huge impact but programmes like Erasmus+ but also the ESF will help to overcome the challenges if sufficiently funded and promoted correctly. Many regions still don't take full advantage of the ESF and good practices where regions develop additional mobility schemes through the ESF are not promoted sufficiently.

- What new challenges should be taken into account in the future?

Recent developments in e.g. Switzerland are showing that some fundamental principles of the European Union such as *free movement* are endangered. Excluding Switzerland from Erasmus+ and Horizon2020 unfortunately sends exactly the opposite message of a United Europe to young people and educators. Trying to make an example of Switzerland hit exactly the wrong population and works against the development of xenophobia as shown in a range of studies. More intercultural dialogue and initiatives to make e.g. young people mobile are of utmost importance to change the population's mind-set. The ET2020 target of 20% of mobile students by 2020 is a great target which will have a very positive impact if reached.

Another challenge arising with high youth unemployment is the additional emphasis on internships as a way to gap education and labour market. Unfortunately we often see low quality internships and interns that are just used the same way as employees without receiving any remuneration. Quality Internships should be supported by e.g. a European label for quality internship providers. ESN believes that quality internships can be a substantial contribution to youth unemployment and more instruments and funding to assure quality should be allocated for this purpose.

- How could the strategy best be linked to other EU policies?

- What would improve stakeholder involvement in a post-crisis growth strategy for Europe? What could be done to increase awareness, support and better implementation of this strategy in your country?

Tools

- What type of instruments do you think would be more appropriate to use to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

- What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the strategy delivers results? What would best be done at Member State level?

  European Policies need support from Civil Society also on National Level. To achieve the necessary support also from National and Local Civil Society, the strong involvement of European Networks (as they cooperate closely with their national and local level) needs to be prioritised to also get the support from their side to push member states to e.g. follow Country specific recommendations or work towards a common European goal.

- How can the strategy encourage Member States to put a stronger policy focus on growth?

- Are targets useful? Please explain.

  Targets *can* be useful if used wisely. They can highlight a certain topic, for example higher education attainment or early school leaving, and give it some well-deserved attention and making people interested in the topic. However, it should be pointed out that these are very complex problems and that putting the finger on just a number is no easy quick-fix to any of these problems. It would also be interesting to develop targets to define more precisely what populations should be reached – for example, include as target audience students with disabilities, students from a disadvantaged family background, etc.

- Would you recommend adding or removing certain targets, or the targets in general? Please explain.

  Being an organisation in the field of education, we are naturally more interested in the education-related targets than other organisations. Given our deep belief in the wonders

of mobility in general and student mobility in particular, we would like to see a Europe 2020 target similar to the ET2020 strategic objective "making lifelong learning and mobility a reality". A new target for the second half of Europe2020 could be, for example, "X % of all higher education students should be mobile and Y % of all the degrees (Bachelor, Master, PhD) earned at European higher education institutions should be earned by nationals of another country than that of the host institutions".

- What are the most fruitful areas for joint EU-Member State action? What would be the added value?

3) Do you have any other comment or suggestion on the Europe 2020 strategy that you would like to share?

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please send your contribution, along with any other documents, to SG-EUROPE2020-CONSULTATION@ec.europa.eu.