

## EARLALL Position to the Communication from the European Commission “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” (COMM 2017, 673 final, published on November 14, 2017)

March 2018




### BACKGROUND

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The Communication ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture’ (the Communication) sets the European Commission’s (EC) vision for how we can create a European Education Area by 2025. It is important to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for job creation, economic growth and social inclusion as well as to experience European identity in all its diversity.

The Communication was the EC contribution to the Gothenburg Summit on the European Pillar of Social Rights on November 17, 2017. The European Council meeting held on December 14, 2017, endorsed this Communication.

Recently, on January 17, 2018, the EC published a first set of initiatives and documents meant as a follow up to the Communication:

-  Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.
-  Digital Education Action Plan.
-  Proposal for a Council Recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching.

A second and more ambitious set of initiatives will be published in the spring 2018 about the following topics:

-  Early childhood education and care.
-  Language learning.
-  Setting up university networks.
-  Recognition of diplomas.
-  Youth strategy.
-  Action plan on Culture.

EARLALL’s opinion is meant to inform the political discussions and the Communication’s follow-up actions taking place in Brussels at the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions and other fora.




### STATEMENT

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EARLALL welcomes the Communication as it addresses important challenges and objectives in view of the future of education in Europe. For the first time in decades, social policies and education are on top of the EU leaders’ agenda and this development should be highlighted. EARLALL also recognizes the important role that is assigned to

the regions and local authorities in the definition of education and culture policies through the subsidiarity principle. Regions and Local entities can actively contribute not only to the design of effective measures that take into account local and European needs, but also to the provision of innovative best practices that can be replicated elsewhere.

The Communication is best linked to the Social Agenda, but at the same time it has to be understood together with the New Skills Agenda adopted by the Commission on June 10, 2016 which focuses on trends and patterns in demands for skills and jobs. Nevertheless, EARLALL would like to highlight the following issues that could have been given greater emphasis in the Communication:

-  The Communication has rightly given a prominent role to the regions and local authorities, as it has been mentioned earlier. The text could be better aligned with the European Commission's Cohesion Policy and Smart Specialisation Strategies that aim to reduce differences and ensure smart growth across Europe. European 'identities' and societal challenges ahead can be further strengthened if we recognise national and regional competitive advantages and we learn from these. As it has been recognised in other EC documents like the new Modernisation Agenda for Universities (May 2017), synergies between Cohesion Policy and research, innovation and education funds should be encouraged and promoted.
-  The benchmark for participation in lifelong learning activities to 25% by 2025 seems to refer more to adult education than to those learners involved in lifelong learning processes. Lifelong learning has to be understood "from cradle to grave" and not only from when an individual completes their education. EARLALL however welcomes the 25% benchmark for participation in adult education (being the EU average for participation in adult learning in 2016<sup>1</sup> of 10.8%).
-  The role of VET should be strongly supported. None of the "Way Forward" measures announced in the Communication is directly tackling VET issues. The positive role of VET to prevent early education leaving and to bring people back to education should be highlighted. It will be difficult to understand an education area by 2025 if we do not recognise a proactive VET system that takes into account:
  - A diversified offer that meets the skills demands of the productive sectors and anticipates future qualification needs.
  - Innovation and new technologies in VET.
  - New active learning methodologies that improve the technical skills and competences and reinforce transversal skills, entrepreneurship and creativity.
  - Joint work and cooperation between VET and higher education institutions to provide answers to new qualifications and new training itineraries.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Education and Training Monitor 2017 – EU targets for 2020.'

- As it is recognised in the Communication, education systems need to impart all the knowledge, skills and competences that are deemed. However, skills needs are changing rapidly and work-based learning, apprenticeships, and education and industry partnerships referred in the Communication are important tools, together with peer learning, but need to be properly developed and exploited. For the most part, employers and industry leaders do not know the skills that will be needed in the next ten or twenty years. Therefore, we need to set up flexible but ambitious strategies and processes that could be put in place to respond rapidly to new needs and demands.
- The geographical scope of the European Education Area proposed by 2025 is not clear either. Will it just refer to the EU countries? Erasmus+ programme countries include the EU countries and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. Erasmus+ Partner countries and mobility can reach out to many more countries and regions in the world. Two important processes promoted by the EC, Bologna (1999) and Copenhagen (2002), show a different geographical area as they include 48 and over 30 countries in Europe respectively.
- This last point also raises questions regarding the implementation of the European Education Area at policy level. Will it be an overarching structure to the Bologna, Copenhagen and upcoming Sorbonne (on diplomas recognition) processes? How will it be aligned with the next generation of EU funding programmes? A strong and ambitious strategy in the area of education and skills can only work with appropriate governance structures and appropriate level of funding.