

EUROPE 2020: INNOVATION, NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND TRAINING

Madrid, 13 and 14 October 2011

CONCLUSIONS PANEL 1 «*Union for Innovation*»

Ángel Díaz Plasencia, Member, Spanish Economic and Social Council

«*Strategy 2020: Innovation and new technologies*»

Contributions to the first debate included the strategic vision of the European Commission (Michel Catinat), practical know-how from a campus of international excellence -Iberus- (Manuel José López Pérez) and the position of 3 national Economic and Social Councils that have been working on this topic: France (Alain Delmas), Netherlands (Ton van der Wijst) and Ireland (Cathal O'Regan), as well as the experience of the European Economic and Social Committee (Joost van Iersel).

Some of the ideas shared in the presentations and the subsequent debate were:

- Innovation is a cross-cutting factor in the Europe 2020 Strategy, and should be a strategic vector for job creation (Catinat).
- There should be closer ties between innovation and the production system in order to guarantee the competitiveness of the European Union today and in the future (Catinat).
- A broad approach should be adopted regarding innovation policies, including “social innovation” and environmental aspects, while taking into account a context of crisis which requires both choices and arbitration (Delmas).
- Specific improvements need to be made: approval of the European patent, specific measures for SMEs, elimination of bureaucratic obstacles, better coordination in the use of European funds. Such measures are necessary for creating a real European Research Space (Van Iersel).

These ideas were illustrated by practical experiences:

- Initiatives, such as the Campus of international excellence, which put into practice a real “union for innovation”, while supporting cross-border cooperation and galvanising the socio-economic environment (López Pérez). They also prove that “resilience” is possible in times of crisis.
- The experience of the Netherlands, with its Platform for Innovation and the Agenda for Investment in Knowledge, was very illustrative. These firmly place the emphasis on links between industry, education and research and on involvement by all the players involved. However, as the speaker (Van der Wijst) stated, it is difficult to climb and easy to fall.
- In Ireland (Cathal O'Regan), the current situation of economic crisis has reduced interest in, or any real chance of acting on the policy for innovation. However, a lesson that has been learnt is that innovation is not just a matter of technology. It goes much further than that (covering finance, marketing and working conditions) and requires the best connections at institutional level. In this, in view of their composition and working techniques, the ESCs have a fundamental role to play.

In conclusion:

- “Europe must keep up its zeal for imagination and its pleasure in debate” (Delmas)
- “We should remember that today the social dialogue has potential added value” (O'Regan)
- “Adversity stimulates imagination” (O'Regan)

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PANEL 2 CONCLUSIONS “*Digital society, a digital agenda for Europe*”

Julián Ariza, Member, Spanish Economic and Social Council

It cannot strictly be stated that shared conclusions were drawn from the experiences described by the participants in the debate in the panel on “*Digital society, a digital agenda for Europe*”. However, it was clear that the ambitious objective proposed by the European Commission in its Agenda of maximising the economic and social potential of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to boost business productivity and competitiveness, while improving quality of life for citizens, comes up against serious difficulties. These include, as the Commission itself acknowledges, the fragmentation of digital markets, the lack of inter-operativity, insufficient efforts to invest in R&D, etc. In all these areas it is difficult to find solutions, especially at this time of extended economic and financial crisis which leads to great uncertainty about the future. There is also the difficulty of a political nature that results from insufficient credibility regarding the determination of some of the most relevant institutions in the EU to act in line with their own proposals.

The focus on subsidiarity, that is, basically leaving implementation of the Agenda in the hands of the various national States, makes it difficult to predict the creation of a single market for telecommunications, to give just one example.

Some positive experiences were also noted, such as those described by the Luxembourg ESC, where the development of digital technologies has pushed the country up in the ranking regarding the position of ICTs in different countries. Governmental support for open networks, connectivity and attracting multinational firms in the sector has been important and, at the same time, public and private initiative have been made compatible.

Several participants agreed that progress has been made in all the EU countries to varying degrees.

It was stressed that, in technological matters, precisely because of their importance for economic recovery, firm decisions are required, as are efforts to invest. Short-term policies need to be combined with a long-term vision.

It was also stated that, when defining a strategy such as that of Europe 2020, certain errors made in the past should have been taken into account as well as the current situation of economic crisis.

Finally, to add a hopeful note, another of the ideas expressed was that the initiative to move towards greater European unity was first launched after the greatest crisis ever in our continent, the 2nd World War. Although there can be no real comparison, the current crisis should be taken as an opportunity for promoting what has been done so far in achieving European unity.

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CONCLUSIONS PANEL 3 «Good Practices in Training»
Javier Ferrer Dufol, Member, Spanish Economic and Social Council

The Session began with a presentation from *Gérard Mayen*, a Specialist in Human Capital Development from the European Foundation for Training in Turin, who gave an introduction to the real or possible functioning of vocational training systems. He stated that they should be considered real centres of human resources which should be attractive for society and should place people, that is, students at the centre. Quality training should be based on mutual trust between trainer and student and should be in touch with the reality of society and business. It should also take into account the participation of social players and the specific features of each country.

On European experiences, *Salvatore Bosco*, Vice-President of the National Council for the Economy and Labour (CNEL) in Italy, explained some good practices in training via the Internet in the field of postal services or Social Security. He stressed that the Italian National Reform Programme places priority on Innovation and Human Capital. Training should be considered an investment for growth which requires social participation and stability over time.

Apostolos Xirafis, Acting Secretary General of the Greek Economic and Social Council (OKE) considered that Vocational Training has become devalued. The OKE would like to contribute to its country's difficult situation by proposing new guidelines for production structures in order to guarantee participation by the social players, especially in the field of vocational training. They would also like to re-launch the social contract for sustainable development.

Xavier Verboven, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee explained how the EESC had set up its emblematic initiative "new skills for new jobs", with the focus on flexicurity and job creation, linking training and employment and improving the quality of jobs and the use of European funds.

Jasmina Mircheva, Advisor to the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council, described some of the changes in the field of education at all levels that Bulgaria considers necessary for the future.

In summary, reforms are needed to adapt training to the needs of business and society. The funding of training policies and actions is of no little importance. All social players should participate in training because of the close connection between training and business.