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ICT EDUCATION: FLEXIBLE STRATEGY AND POLITICAL WILL ARE ESSENTIAL

ICT skills and digital agenda are among the top priorities of the new European Commission. Furthermore, the significance of this sector is expected to increase. ICT skills were also topic of a debate co-organized by CEBRE on 25th November in Prague. According to Jan Michal from European Commission Representation to the CR, the main EU's priority is improvement of education in ICT. Alexander Riedl from the European Commission pointed out that rapid digitization requires a profound upskilling of citizens and workforce as many Europeans do not have enough digital skills. The situation is different from country to country and the CR is close to the European average. "We witness a paradoxical situation: although many Europeans are unemployed, we see many vacancies for digital technology jobs which cannot be filled," added Mr. Riedl. That's why the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs was established by the Commission, supported by 57 organizations so far. Ondřej Neumajer who chaired the working group preparing the Strategy of Digital Education by 2020 at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the CR

informed that the strategy was officially adopted by the Czech government on the 12th of November 2014. The strategy has three priorities: implement new methods of learning making use of digital technologies to the education process, improve information processing and digital skills of students and develop their computational thinking. Jan Mühlfeit, Chairman of Microsoft Europe, supports initiatives focused on developing digital skills as well. He sees the lack of digital skills as one of the reasons why Europe is losing its competitiveness. In addition, Europe needs leaders that would be capable of implementing strategies of digital education. That is a big issue in the CR, according to President of ICT Union Svatoslav Novák. Although strategies have been introduced before, they were never properly implemented because of insufficient political will. "Education is a long term process and there is no easy and fast solution in this situation," said Vice-President of Czech Chamber of Commerce Zdeněk Somr. Therefore, it is necessary to promote lifelong learning and adapt strategies to rapidly changing environment.

CEBRE was founded in 2002 by the three most important Czech business organizations - Czech Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Confederation of Employers' and Entrepreneurs' Associations of the Czech Republic with kind support of the Ministry of Industry and Trade via its Trade promotion agency CzechTrade.



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News FLASH

>BETTER TIMES AHEAD FOR CZECH SMEs

According to Economic Barometer performed in November by the Czech Chamber of Commerce, SMEs expectations improved by 7 percentage points. Obtained data correspond with annual increase of GDP by 2.5 % in the Czech Republic in Q2 of 2014.

>EMPLOYERS CALL FOR A MORE PROACTIVE APPROACH TOWARDS THE EU

President of the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic Jaroslav Hanák urged Czech political representation to be more proactive vis-à-vis European institutions. He said that during the opening conference of the National Convent on EU.

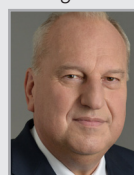
>EESC EMPLOYERS GROUP BUREAU MET IN PRAGUE

The Employers Group Bureau of the European Economic and Social Committee met on 7th November in Prague to discuss EU related topics. The need to increase competitiveness of European industry through the support of technical education was stressed during the seminar organized in cooperation with Czech Chamber of Commerce. The participants were addressed by State Secretary for EU affairs Tomáš Prouza and President of the Chamber Vladimír Dlouhý.

MEPs CORNER

In the previous term 2009-2014 we had experienced a number of tense debates on ICT issues including digital skills and education in the European Parliament. Recently, with the new Commission putting even more emphasis on Digital agenda, ITRE (Industry, Research, Energy; unfortunately ICT is not explicitly included in the title) as the main committee in charge has already started to focus closely on this sector. As an administrative board member of one of the Czech technical universities I am also personally involved in the issue of educating the

ICT students in the Czech Republic. In this regard I am glad to hear that the ambition is to take seriously the national strategy aiming at filling the gap of highly educated experts. I hope this "window of opportunity" will be used for future economic growth and ICT jobs.



MEP Evžen Tošenovský, Committee on Industry, Research and Energy of the European Parliament

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS DISCUSSED IN PRAGUE

At the beginning of November, Prague hosted international conference on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US. The event brought together stakeholders representing the Government of the Czech Republic, the European Parliament, European and Czech business organizations, trade unions and civil society. Furthermore, Ignacio Garcia Bercero, EU Chief Negotiator of TTIP, took part in the discussion. The position of Czech government is supportive to TTIP as it would liberalize trade and increase EU exports, which is important for small and open economy of the Czech Republic. Although the agreement wouldn't have a major impact on Czech economy, the US is an important market for many Czech companies producing high value added

products. Many companies, especially SMEs, would benefit from the overall exports increase of EU to the US through subcontractor supply chain. Czech government is aware of the controversies related to the negotiations, being it the ongoing debate on lowering EU standards or the more recent one on investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). The government is well aware of the need for transparency vis-à-vis general public. Therefore, the Ministry of Trade set up a TTIP dedicated webpage where questions can be asked directly to the Ministry. Czech government would like TTIP negotiations to be concluded by the end of 2015 or early 2016, given that all the necessary provisions such as ISDS, regulatory issues or open access to public procurement are well negotiated and included in the final text.

COMMISSION'S INVESTMENT PACKAGE UNVEILED



At the end of November, the European Commission presented its long-awaited investment plan prepared in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB) that should help the EU's growth get back on track. The main pillar of the plan is the newly established European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) that is expected to raise 315 billion EUR in the next three years. The other two pillars of the plan focus on creating a list of trustworthy projects that should attract even more private investment and removing regulatory barriers to

long term investment. The main strength of the EFSI should be its leverage effect. While only 16 billion EUR will be used from the EU budget and 5 billion EUR from the budget of EIB, the Commission expects the multiplier value to be 15, giving the estimated 315 billion EUR for investment. EFSI should focus mainly on infrastructure, broadband, energy, transport, education and research projects. Furthermore, SMEs should be supported from the fund as well. European business organizations praise the plan as a first step that should

remove investment obstacles in the EU and attract investors from the private sector. It is an important signal that the new Commission aims to reverse negative or very weak growth levels and make the EU a place with favourable business environment. However, announcement of the plan is just the beginning. Although there is a lot of liquidity in the EU and the interest rates are very low, there is a lack of trust in the EU that hampers investment. Therefore, EU needs to focus on better regulation that would create favourable investment environment. One of the crucial things that need to be addressed in order to attract long term investment is the high costs of doing business in the EU, caused especially by high energy prices. In addition, the access to finance remains problematic especially for SMEs. One of the things that could be an important step forward when it comes to attractiveness of the EU would be a strong single market. There are still many barriers that need to be addressed, especially in the area of services. As mentioned earlier, the investment plan is a very important step towards making the EU a more attractive investment destination, but one of many. It is not a silver bullet that will suddenly improve the unfavourable situation in the EU, but it is an important gesture that the new Commission is determined to bring growth back to Europe.

EESC CORNER: TOWARDS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

On 2 July 2014, the European Commission published a package of proposals comprising: the communication *Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe* (COM (2014) 398 final) plus four more items on waste, recycling, etc. The key document of this initiative is the communication "Towards a circular economy" which introduces an attempt to put in a legal framework the flagship initiative of the EC on resource efficiency. Given the ambitious targets that EU has set with regard to waste management, any revision of the legislative framework must be aimed at strengthening the industrialization of the sector and the competitiveness of the market to increase the overall efficiency of the services and the enhancement of waste potential. However, such concerns are not adequately addressed by the current Commission's proposal and, obviously, it would be better to take the package back, facilitate health checks and revise the most critical elements of this initiative.

There are numerous serious question marks, among them, for instance:

- **Comparable data** throughout the EU28 are insufficient, even do not exist.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** the correct implementation of this principle

should not entail unnecessary extra-costs or create an unequal distribution of such costs within the industry chain, as well as distort effects in terms of competitiveness.

- **Harmonization of rules:** the proposal put forward by the Commission according to which Member States will be given the possibility to define their own criteria for the design of packaging, and for targets for prevention and recovery should not hinder the free circulation of goods at EU level.
- **Revision of the targets and of the calculation methodologies:** the proposal put forward in the Packaging Directive to revise both the targets and the methodology for calculation of the same, would generate further uncertainty for the obliged entities.
- **Waste Hierarchy:** the proposal put forward in the Packaging Directive to exclude the possibility, under certain conditions, to derogate from the waste hierarchy may generate problems to implement an effective and efficient waste management.
- **Delegated acts:** the proposal to give the Commission the power to adopt "delegated acts" should be limited to an opportunity and must be taken forward with the full involvement of the relevant sectors.

If any targets are to be adopted, they should be measurable throughout the 28 Member states, and they should motivate to reduce waste occurrence and handling the waste in the most efficient way. Such targets should be:

- To establish **waste collecting facilities** with adequate density in all MSs;
- To **limit the volume of landfilled waste per capita** (same value in all MSs).

Such targets would be motivating much more than envisaged raw material intensity on national economies.



Josef Zbořil
Member of the Group
of Employers
EESC

CEBRE CALENDAR:

- 2015 events to be specified in the next issue.

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CEBRE – Czech Business Representation, protects the interests of the Czech business community in relation to EU institutions, informs Czech businesses about EU legislation affecting them, trains Czech entrepreneurs in Brussels and represents Czech business associations at European business federations. Contact: Czech House, 60 Rue du Trône, 1050 Brussels, Tel: +32 2 502 0766/+32 2 502 8091, e-mail: brussels@cebre.cz, www.cebre.cz