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To: Dr. Christos Datsikas et al.
Telecom, Information Society, Galileo and Postal
Services Attaché
Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU

Athens, Greece, December 10, 2015

Comments of the HIU on the “e-Skills” EU initiative

Dear sirs,

The **Hellenic Informatics Union’s (HIU)**¹, established in 2001, is the official representative of all scientists in the field of Informatics & Communications Technologies (ICT), with a university (BSc) degree in Informatics, Computer Science, Computer Engineering and Software Engineering in Greece. We are committed to the preservation of high standards in the scientific, professional, technical and ethical code of conduct for the people working in various areas related to ICT, including Education, Research & Development, Industry, Academia, Government, etc. Our primary goal is the proper organization of the ICT field in Greece, in terms of academic and professional standards, through the establishment of a National Chamber of Informatics (NCI), a critical actor that does not yet exist.

This letter is a summary of our comments regarding the upcoming (informal) meeting of EU ministers, as described in the relevant memo: “*Background document for informal ministerial dinner on 10 December 2015*”. The status of e-skills, digital education and the EU Digital Agenda are issues of utmost importance

¹<https://www.linkedin.com/company/hellenic-informatics-union>

for the ICT sector, especially in Greece where both unemployment rates and digital gap are at record high.

These are our comments on the three main questions of the memo:

1. (Q1) *“Are the issues raised here important/relevant for your country? Can you indicate a particularly impactful policy that your country has put in place to address digital skills gaps?”*

- The whole issue of gaps in digital skills is of major importance in Greece, for two reasons: (a) these gaps seem to be greater than in other countries, DESI 2014 index ranks Greece at the 26th (out of 28) position; and (b) unemployment rate is at EU's record high for years now at about 28%, especially with young people (almost 49%) with university degrees and rich credentials.
- An approach to a solution would be to utterly change the current policy that concerns qualification of digital skills' teachers. Today's policy in Greece could be roughly described as: “Anyone who can use a word processor and a spreadsheet can teach computer skills”. For instance, there are still plenty of Physical Education teachers, or even Theologists that teach computer skills or even Computer Science lessons in Greece's Secondary Education. We believe that someone should at least possess a degree in Computer Science or equivalent to qualify for teaching digital skills. In words, Informatics needs to be taken seriously, as a science and as a profession, instead of defining it inside the extremely narrow limits of everyday computer tools that are neither infrastructural or safety-critical.

2. (Q2) *“Responsibilities on digital skills development are often shared between different ministries. How can effective collaboration be ensured across ministries on this important issue?”*

- Effective collaboration on issues of the IS/IT education and the ICT business sector can only be ensured via proper governmental policies and administration at the top level. Even today, Greece has no central actor to organize, manage and improve the quality standards for both education and business in this area.
- It is imperative that a National Chamber of Informatics (NCI) is established, promptly and properly, filling the gap that exists for more than three decades now. Greece is one of the very few countries in

the EU that no such Chamber exists; as a result, the whole Informatics sector is completely disorganized, with complete lack of quality standards and assertions in all aspects, i.e., business staffing, QA in ICT projects, cyber-security legislation, etc. Furthermore, it is imperative that the EU establishes a unified open-standards policy for the various ICT-related services, protocols and data exchanges, both at the national level (official EU guidelines) and as formal EU legislations. The same argument stands true for hardware and especially software products, where using non-EU closed-source and patent-protected applications pose severe economic and employment disadvantages for the EU market.

3. (Q3) *“How can we at European level best add value and help Member States in the development of Digital Skills in the EU, in particular in the context of the forthcoming Commission Skills Agenda? How can we best foster national partnerships between relevant stakeholders?”*

- The EU and particularly the European Parliament & the relevant Committees should focus on a broader plan for the IS/IT area as a whole. In practice, the EU’s vision should include everything, from academic education and professional certifications to labor market and business models. Informatics is a very unique sector, people need very high education standards in both scientific and professional level, while at the same time continuous re-training is expected by default throughout the career. Focusing on immediate “business” needs is a lost cause, since the actual skill set required in high-intensity ICT and/or R&D businesses changes rapidly within 24-48 months time.
- The solution to this problem is not trying to keep up the pace by supplying the labor market with just-in-time highly e-skilled but “expendable” ICT workers - this does not work, the statistics already prove that. Instead, we should focus on making the ICT labor market more broadly-educated on both IS and IT, i.e., make the workers more adaptable, solution “producers” rather than solution “consumers”, while at the same time armed with a solid background to enrich throughout their career with up-to-date technical re-training.

The HIU calls all parties involved in the EU's Digital Agenda initiatives to endorse proper long-term strategies for the benefit of the society as a whole. There is no point in chasing digital excellence if a great percentage of the society is left behind. It is our responsibility, for this generation and the next, to bring the digital age to the people and not the other way around.

Yours sincerely,

(Mr.) Harris Georgiou (MSc,PhD)
HIU, Gen. Secretary (A.C.)

cc: Hellenic Informatics Union (HIU) - Secretarial Office