

# **Minutes of the Informal dinner debate on digital skills hosted by**

**Prime Minister X. Bettel and Commissioner G. H. Oettinger**

**Brussels, 10/12/2015**

## **1. Introduction**

Prime Minister Xavier Bettel

Technological progress and the ensuing digital revolution have a considerable impact on our daily life and on the way we work. Businesses call for digital skills and adaptability. The challenge Europe is facing is huge. This is also why digital skills have been a priority of the Luxembourg Presidency.

Digital has an impact on all policies, all layers of society, and all companies. Discussions on the digital skills challenge needs to take place horizontally, across sectors, at all levels, in all Member States. First, there is a social angle: we need to avoid a new digital divide. Second, there is the employment angle: new technologies should be at the service of the workforce, even if they may lead to a change in job profiles. It is key to adapt the competences of the employed and unemployed through training. Luxembourg, for example, has launched a programming course for unemployed people selected by recruiting companies. Third, there is the education angle: kids need to be prepared for the challenges of the future. They need to be incentivised to go for creative, digital jobs. Luxembourg has launched Digital4Education, to strengthen the role of schools in the digital context and help teachers to integrate digital pedagogical tools. It is only by adopting a horizontal and strategic vision that Europe can overcome the barriers that may persist in a Digital Single Market. Our strategy "Digital Lëtzebuerg" is a multi-stakeholder one inspired by the Commission's Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs.

Commissioner Günther H. Oettinger

In the past, IT was about specific sectors: hardware, software, and telecommunications. Today, digital is transforming all sectors of the economy and how we work. Digitisation must be supported through smart regulation, research and deployment funding such as for 5G and digital networks. Digital skills are an essential part of the equation.

Demand for ICT experts can currently not be matched. Also the workforce needs digital skills. We all need digital competencies. The current level of digital skills in Europe is clearly insufficient for the changes on the labour markets: many jobs will disappear, many new jobs will be created, and all other jobs will fundamentally change. Public policy makers have a responsibility to act upon the digital skills gaps and mismatches.

We need to generate additional study places and attract young people to study digital technology related subjects. For teachers to be role models for young people they need to understand digital technologies. We have a good educational infrastructure to leverage: public and private education and training organisations, social partners, chambers of commerce etc.

Of course, education and training are a national or even a regional responsibility but we need to act together to the benefit of a European labour market. We need to reflect together how we can boost training and re-training in Europe, across borders, for the workforce and unemployed people, for innovation and competitiveness, and for future generations in Europe.

Your proposals will be an important input to the New Skills Agenda for Europe which the Commission will launch in spring 2016.

#### Commissioner Navracsics

While countries like China, New Zealand, and South Africa are - according to the OECD ranking - investing in education, the overall tendency in the EU of public expenditure in education is declining. Yet, education is a precondition for economic policy: a good education policy today ensures competitiveness tomorrow.

In education there are three key components to be stressed. Firstly, education infrastructure in the EU is in relative poor state, lacking fast broadband digital networks, high connectivity and computers. Yet, there are instruments to invest more in education: regional funds, cohesion funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investment. Secondly, there is a need to invest more in teacher training. Too few teachers are digitally confident today. Pupils are sometimes considered better informed with regard to digital skills than teachers; however, they are not necessarily conscious consumers. Therefore, and thirdly, schools need to renew curricula, in terms of educational content and use innovative pedagogies. To be conscious actors in the digital economy pupils need to be taught, besides digital skills, basic coding and entrepreneurial skills.

The Commission supports all tangible projects that aim at fostering peer learning and policy cooperation between Member States through, for example, Education and Training 2020, Erasmus+, and the European Institute for Innovation and Technology which supports knowledge and innovation communities that bring together private investment and academia in research and development activities.

## **2. Debate**

- (a) Are the digital skills gaps described in the background document relevant for your country? Can you indicate a particularly impactful policy that your country has put in place to address digital skills gaps?**

All delegations acknowledge the importance of developing digital skills within their Member States in the face of rapid digitisation. Policies to tackle the digital skills gaps are twofold and in many Member States take place in parallel: digitising education and training the workforce. In this respect, several countries refer to the importance of close cooperation between education and industry.

With regard to education, several Member States consider this an infrastructure that requires investment and refer to the need of training teachers. Also the inclusion of computer programming/coding is considered important by a number of countries. For example, FI will include coding and computer programming in basic and upper secondary school curricula from 2016 while the UK has already introduced computing in its school curricula.

With regard to skilling the workforce in both the private and the public sector, several Member States refer to the need to work closely with the private sector, also to anticipate and revise digital skills requirements and to design apprenticeships. Several Member States specifically refer to the need to address the ICT specialists' gap.

At the same time, several Member States raise the need to include the disadvantaged and the unemployed in the digital skills initiatives. For example, the UK started in 2014 a strategy to ensure that everyone will be digitally capable by 2020, FR has developed a "digital passport" for those who received digital training, HU launched in 2014 a training and mentoring programme for disadvantaged people, and PL launched a "lighthouse keepers" project, demonstrating the benefits of ICT and organising tailor-made workshops. Some countries highlight the importance of social partners' involvement in this part of the challenge.

Several Member States refer to the need for more funding for education, which could be delivered through public/private investment (including EFSI), and/or local authorities and national funding.

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

There seems to be a consensus that in most Member States responsibilities to tackle the digital skills gap are shared between various ministerial departments. Effective collaboration can be assured through various means, for example through the preparation of a strategic government programme.

Several Member States also indicate the need to involve other stakeholders such as NGOs, companies including SMEs, social partners.

**(c) How can the 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 level can support Member States through the development of a common European response and guidance for strategic methods since shared goals can support and direct national level measures.

Examples of concrete support at EU level include: sharing of best practices, raising awareness, promoting digital learning tools, facilitating mobility, help spreading the link between business and education, facilitating partnership between Member States, and identifying EU funds for common opportunities (ESF, EFSI, Erasmus+, etc).

### **3. Conclusions**

Prime Minister Xavier Bettel

Given that the challenges are similar everywhere, it is all the more important to exchange about these challenges and the solutions. To facilitate cooperation across Ministries in tackling the digital skills challenge, each country has to act internally because responsibilities of Ministries are defined at the national level. This cannot be done at the European level. The

objective should be that young people recognise that their future is in Europe, not in Silicon Valley.

This first Informal Debate at Ministerial level needs follow-up, even when current responsible actors change. Delegations are therefore invited to send a written contribution on national best practices with regard to unemployed people and with regard to pupils, students, teachers, and professors. If Europe misses the digital skills train we will not lead innovation. We will be dependent on other continents that are and will keep moving on.

Commissioner Günther H. Oettinger

The digital skills challenge is one that regards schools, vocational education and training, universities, study places, and qualifications of the employed and the unemployed. It is clear that whilst many activities are ongoing across Europe, many do need strengthening. This regards in particular the need to increase the number of study places. Digital strategies need to support more courses, more places, more apprenticeships, and to attract more students into ICT-related subject matters, to make sure Europe has a sufficient number of graduates to take up the digital jobs available in the labour market. This means investing in education and involving Finance Ministers. It also means better professional guidance for our children to stimulate them to enter in digital/IT professions which we need to support, grow, fine-tune and subsequently occupy.

As a follow-up to this first debate, all delegations are invited to submit early next year information detailing the topics briefly addressed during the debate so that they can be taken into account for the forthcoming New Skills Agenda for Europe Communication, which should be adopted in late spring 2016. Finally, work will continue with the NL and SK Presidencies. The objective should be to come to a shared concept in autumn 2016 on how to increase study places and develop digital skills in the following years in Europe.