



**European Economic and Social Committee
The President**

OPENING SPEECH BY STAFFAN NILSSON, PRESIDENT OF THE EESC

at

Conference of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) "A bridge to the future - European policy for vocational education and training"

17.03.2011, 09h:30

Dear Commissioner, dear distinguished guests,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all to the conference organised by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in the premises of the European Economic and Social Committee.

I am convinced that the next hours will see a very fruitful and inspiring exchange of views on vocational education and training policies in Europe. This conference is very timely as all seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 initiative have been launched, including "Youth on the Move" and the "Agenda for New Skills and Jobs", both of which have vocational education and training at their heart.

I would like to thank the Agency for its sustained promotion of VET issues on the European agenda. Your work has equipped European decision makers to better implement initiatives and it will help them to implement new initiatives and to measure progress at national and European level.

The crisis has demonstrated its seriousness over the last two years. Unemployment is still growing at a worrying rate and signs of recovery are shaky. Young people, who represent our hope for the future, have particular problems with entering the labour market and keeping a stable job. The crisis has put our VET systems to the test.

Getting the economy back in good shape is one of my programme's main priorities: if we want a strong social Europe, we need to meet with sustainable growth that gives us more jobs. To meet this challenge, new knowledge and new skills are needed. And VET can



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help to make reality. VET is also a key for reducing poverty and unemployment

Part of the solution lies with more efficient and up-to-date VET systems that improve the skills and employability of workers, with improved mobility and a better forecast of skills needs. A lot has been achieved at European level. And the first steps have been taken towards making an overall forecast of future skills deficiencies and measuring learning outcomes and the satisfaction of VET end-users.

But looking at the 2010 targets related to education and training and the actual results, more effort is needed and that more funding should be allocated to VET.

- We have to continue to modernise existing systems and improve the image of VET so that more students and workers become attracted to learning and upgrading their skills and competences.
- Quality apprenticeships and internships should be integrated into learning curricula.
- Employers should be able to find candidates for vacancies with the necessary skills – in other words: employability should be improved.
- Marrying formal education with non-formal learning will benefit all, but especially disadvantaged groups.
- And finally, civil society should be more involved in VET measures in order to create synergies between initiatives at European, national or sectoral levels. The Committee will be honoured to assist in this process.

I am convinced that this meeting will help us to look back at the achievements of recent years and will inspire further progress. I wish you all – I wish us all – a fruitful conference!

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