Achieving the European Education Area?

Advice on the Communication of the European Commission

Wijs beleid door overleg

Advice on the Council's own initiative

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The following parties were consulted: Council on Lifelong and Life-Wide Learning (*Raad Levenslang en Levensbreed Leren*) on 1 December 2020; Primary Education Council (*Raad Basisonderwijs*) on 2 December 2020; Secondary Education Council (*Raad Secundair Onderwijs*) on 3 December 2020; working group International Trends Higher Education Policy (*Internationale tendensen hogeronderwijsbeleid*) on 3 December 2020

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1   Situation

In the past, the Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, Vlor) frequently rendered advice at key moments in European education policy. The last time it did so was in September 2019, when the Vlor formulated some recommendations for European cooperation following 'Education and Training 2020'.[1] Therefore, the Council looked forward with great interest to the Communication 'Achieving the European Education Area by 2025'[2], published by the European Commission on 30 September 2020. Wouter Kerkhove, the attaché for Education and Training (general delegation of the Flemish Government, Permanent Representation of Belgium in the EU) explained the Communication to the Vlor members and provided information about the context, priorities, and major courses of action.

The advice is addressed to the Flemish Minister of Education as an inspiration for the talks in preparation of the Council of Education Ministers of the EU of 19 February 2021.[3] The agenda of this Council includes some conclusions on a European Education Area.

The Vlor only renders advice on the great outlines and general principles of the Communication. Within the short time span, after all, it is impossible to formulate thorough recommendations with each of the numerous actions, many of which are still in their infancy. Perhaps, the European Commission will publish some follow-up communications on the aspects of the European Education Area in 2021. Every time, the Vlor will determine whether rendering advice is necessary.

2   Closer cooperation, but within the competences of the Union

The Vlor appreciates that the European Union stimulates and supports cooperation concerning Education and Training, and opens plans to enhance this cooperation. For more than two decades, the Vlor has been a member of EUNEC[4], the European Network of Education Councils, and in this period, it has keenly experienced the added value of international cooperation.

Creating a European Education Area offers **many opportunities**. The experiences in the European Education Area suggest that international cooperation has positive effects for this sector: higher education has been modernised due to the Bologna process. Although more convergence for sectors like vocational education and training and adult education is certainly complex, the Vlor wants to focus on closer international cooperation on education, and the council appreciates that the Union has a stronger focus on this.

Simultaneously, the council calls for vigilance and permanent respect for the principle of **subsidiarity**. The Member States and their educational field are responsible for the education policy; the Union only has a supporting function here.

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[1] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.

[2] European Commission (2020). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025. COM(2020) 625 final*. Brussels: European Commission.

[3] Flemish Parliament (2020). *Beleids- en begrotingstoelichting Onderwijs en Vorming. Begrotingsjaar 2021.* 'Within the Council of the European Union, the negotiations on the future European Education Area are currently in progress. I actively participate in these negotiations, in which I ensure the principles and challenges of the Flemish education policy are included in this European cooperation framework.'

[4] www.eunec.eu

It is not clear to what extent the Communication will lead to even stronger control of the education policy in the Member States by the EU and to more convergence, or even to equalisation of educational systems.

- ¬ We note that education policy is linked to the European Semester ('The enabling framework will foster integration of education and training in the European Semester'). If educational purposes are directly linked to this, it will mean that they can be embedded in country-specific recommendations, which have an imperative nature. In the past few years, education was already part of country-specific recommendations, but the wording in the Communication suggests that the EU wants to strengthen its grip on education policy in the Member States.
- ¬ There are also indications that the Union wants to set up structures, modelled after Bologna, in addition to the treaty texts with a view to automatic recognition and equalisation of diploma and European quality standards for degree programmes.

As the ambition of the Commission is not altogether clear, it is difficult for the Vlor to position itself. On the one hand, it is good that the EU encourages and supports cooperation in education more and better. The Vlor advocates cooperation where this can have added value. On the other hand, there is the risk that the Commission does so via the European Semester, and that this cooperation is narrowed down to economic objects. Wide training should not be curtailed. All depends on what the cooperation in this European Education Area will be like in practice and how governance will develop in the next few years.

At any rate, the council insists that the subsidiarity principle remains very much in place. Member States have to be vigilant and have to display assertive autonomy. European frameworks for cooperation among educational systems are a source of inspiration – a wake-up-call at times – but should never replace the Flemish policy accents. The Flemish education policy cannot and shall not be a reflection of, or be restricted to, the objects of the European Union.[5]

The Vlor calls for a thorough reflection about the principle of subsidiarity from the idea that it is currently difficult to give any clear indication as to the extent to which the European policy is allowed to have control. The Vlor wants to play its part in facilitating this debate for the Flemish education stakeholders.

3 The European Education Area: a 'container communication' or new education policy?

The Vlor has the general impression that there is some imbalance in the way in which the Communication has been drawn up. The objectives may be very ambitious, but a lot remains unclear, and many of the proposed actions are still in their infancy. It is unclear whether this Commission initiative has to be interpreted as some kind of container communication, in which existing or planned actions are joined, or as an ambitious plan for new European education policy.

The Vlor therefore advocates **more transparency and clarity** about the intentions of the Commission, and for **realism** in the ambitions.

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[5] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.

3.1   The European Education Area versus ET2030?

The Vlor looked forward to the successor to ET2020, the strategic framework for Education and Training 2020. Simultaneously, the term 'European Education Area' has been around for several years now. The Vlor wanted to see some more coherence between the post-2020 framework and the actions in the framework of the European Education Area.[6] This 'European Education Area' is now found to be the actual successor to ET2020. The Commission could have communicated this a bit more clearly.

Whereas ET2020 was presented as a 'strategic framework', there is currently an 'enabling framework'[7]. So what exactly is the difference? On the face of it, the Vlor is positive about the new term 'enabling framework'. After all, legislative instruments are required to execute strategies. But during the informal consultations between Ministers of Education on 30 November 2020 (two months after the Communication was published), there was again talk of a 'strategic framework'.

The Communication will gain strength, if these issues are clarified and if the intentions are clear to the policy-makers and citizens in the EU.

3.2   The European Education Area versus the Skills Agenda?

Education is also controlled from the European policy domain of Employment and the courses of action from the Skills Agenda. With the division of educational purposes on the one hand and training purposes within the framework of employment policy on the other hand, there is loss of coherence in education policy control. The Vlor calls for a focus on maximum coherence between the various policy domains with respect to educational purposes. A directorate for Education is preferable to control from several directorates.[8]

3.3   Imbalance in the proposed actions

For each of the six dimensions a long list of actions is mentioned. These actions are highly diverse, both in their extent and intended impact and in their state of implementation. Some actions are merely continuing or intensifying what already exists, whereas other actions are brand new. Some actions have already been described in detail in earlier Commission Communications or Council Recommendations, and others are still in the stage of 'the Commission plans to launch...'

Some specific examples:
- *The action plan for digital education is one of the actions under the European Education Area. This action plan appeared on the same day as the Communication on a European Education Area but in a separate, comprehensive Communication. Why this separate Communication for this action plan if it is part of the European Education Area anyway?*
- *There are three networks involved: the European Universities (already in progress), the Teachers Academies (still in the pilot phase), and the Centres for VET excellence (still in the pilot phase). The Centres for VET excellence are to be developed into the model of the European Universities. However, is this realistic, given the fact that the vocational*

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[6] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.
[7] The Communication has not been translated into Dutch yet.
[8] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.

education and training sector is far more fragmented than the higher education sector? Also, with respect to the Teacher Academies to be, there will be many questions.

This huge diversity renders assessing what exactly is intended with the Communication on the European Education Area difficult. Is it really about a new concept for cooperation in education, or is it merely about a summary of all that is happening and will be happening in the field of education?

3.4   What is behind the benchmarks?

Some of the benchmarks from ET2020 are retained. Some benchmarks are entirely new. Other benchmarks are retained, but this time the standards are higher. Yet other benchmarks are more or less retained, but they are formulated differently.[9]

The Vlor calls for making the motivation for these changes clear. At the same time, the Council wants to have as much continuity in the benchmarks as possible. These should also be understandable to the policy-makers and to education. If the Union wants to achieve results via benchmarks, everybody has to go along with the objectives.

Some specific examples:
- *One of the six pillars of the Communication is 'Green and Digital Europe'. In this respect it seems logical that there will be a new benchmark concerning digital skills. So why is there no benchmark concerning sustainability? Wouldn't it be more logical to group the jumble of benchmarks more and link it directly to priorities?*
- *The benchmark for participation in lifelong learning was 15%. The EU falls short of this percentage (results ET Monitor 2019). At first sight, it is therefore surprising that the new benchmark is 50% participation. Only after careful reading, it is clear that for the existing benchmark the criterion 'the last four weeks before questioning' was used and that 'last year' applies to the new benchmark (it should be noted that the Vlor considers 'last year' a better criterion). What is the use of the benchmarks if they are hardly transparent? How can this lead to comparable data?*

3.5   Unclear timeline

The Communication includes the ambition to realise a European Education Area by 2025, with the help of an 'enabling framework': 'This Communication sets out a vision to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 and presents the concrete steps to deliver on these ambitions.' By that time, the governance should be in order. Until then, most arrangements of ET2020 will be retained (thematic working groups, PLAs, etc.). It seems to be realistic to continue to work in the same manner until there is a clear, new framework, but is 2025 too ambitious?

The deadline for meeting the benchmarks within the same 'enabling framework' is 2030. Wouldn't it be clearer and more logical to use 2025 here as a timeline as well? Or, conversely, to take 2030 as a deadline straight away for realising the European Education Area?

At any rate, the Vlor calls for a clear as well as realistic timeline.

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[9] An overview of the existing benchmarks and the proposed benchmarks is provided in the appendix below, at the end of this text.

3.6 Continue to build on cooperation achieved

In the Communication, it says: 'The European Education Area is rooted in decades of education cooperation at EU level.' That is correct, and the Vlor recommends that building on the basis of what really works should continue, rather than launching a multitude of new initiatives of which the impact and feasibility are yet unclear.

There is no or hardly any reference in the Communication whether there should be further development on the basis of existing instruments, such as EQF, ECTS, or ECVET. Much time, energy, and resources have been spent on these for many years. Continuing to build on this acquis leads to more coherence and avoids a situation of a multitude of instruments existing side by side, with few mutual connections.

4 More attention for democratic (global) citizenship

4.1 Democratic values under pressure

As a result of the corona crisis, economic cooperation and recovery were automatically emphasised. The purely economic perspective of the European Semester is gaining importance. At the same time, democratic values are under pressure at various levels:

- There is the recent problem of countries in the EU where fundamental values that are the basis of a constitutional state are coming under pressure. Furthermore, there is a trend towards withdrawing to the national level. This is certainly also reflected in education in these Member States, and this education will be an integral part of the European Education Area.
- Also, within the Member States with a long democratic tradition, the pressure on democratic values will increase. Measures taken in an emergency situation (after terrorist attacks, during the corona crisis, etc.) are necessary but have to be proportional and limited in time. We notice there is a trend towards using these measures more widely or towards making them permanent.
- One of the six pillars or the Communication is geopolitical dimension. When the Union is going to cooperate more closely world-wide, vigilance with respect to respect for democratic values will be of the essence.

4.2 More attention to democratic values within the European Education Area

The Vlor regrets there is little attention in the Communication, and therefore in the future cooperation in Education and Training, to democratic citizenship.[10] The new and promising élan in the Paris Declaration[11] of 2015, in the wake of the terrorist attacks, now seems to fade away.

The Vlor calls for watching democratic values in education and proposes that the European Reference Framework 'Competences for democratic culture' of the Council of Europe[12] be used as a touchstone. The European Convention on Human Rights is the point of departure of the

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[10] In the Rome Communiqué of 19 November 2020, 'fundamental values' are referred to: 'The EHEA of our vision will fully respect the fundamental values of higher education and democracy and the rule of law.'

[11] European Council (2015). *Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education*. Paris: European Council.

[12] Council of Europe (2016). *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies. Summary.* Brussels: Council of Europe.

framework. All EU Member States have signed the Convention, which is focused on protecting human rights, democratic values, and principles of the rule of law.

Attention to democratic citizenship can have various forms in the European Education Area:

- Broad education is not to be run down because of economic strategies. The Vlor indicates it should be borne in mind that in addition to lifelong learning there is life-wide learning. Learning should not be focused on qualification exclusively. Within the focus on life-wide learning, part-time arts education should also be promoted. Of course, this cannot be transferred to other countries overnight, but the importance of arts education cannot be denied. It should be recommended that the participation is identified and encouraged, also from the fact that part-time arts education falls between two stools in Erasmus+. Part-time arts education cannot be regarded as adult education, for there are minors among the learners too, and it is not in the compulsory education category either.

- It is therefore advisable to reconsider the intention of EU monitoring. Whereas monitoring currently seems to be focused primarily on registering and ranking the performance of each country individually, the Union should rather use the benchmark framework as a way to pursue collective objectives together, as a Union. A binding and appealing discourse, which is aimed at winning over all Member States and at stimulating cooperation, is lacking.

- Citizenship is not only about content but also about the importance of participation on the part of the learner and on the part of the teacher. The EU has to use citizenship and participation as basic principles; it has to set an example of citizenship.

- In the growing trend towards digital education, the link to democratic citizenship needs to be safeguarded. The Union has to ensure that human rights and children's rights are respected in the development of a digital Europe. This applies to an even larger extent when global for-profit players are called upon for digitisation. Are the values promoted by these global players in line with the values of the Union? It is uncertain, for instance, whether global digital players always comply with the anti-child labour laws. Parents and teachers fear that far-reaching digitisation is a threat to the pedagogic-educational values they want to teach their children and youngsters. And what about the security of data of pupils who, from a very young age, create digital portfolios? Global private players make profits on these young users' data. They do not release the algorithms used in the process, and this raises some fundamental questions. Preferably, the Union should contribute to raising awareness. There is a need of more transparency and of an initiative of the European Commission in this respect. Digitisation will not last, if it does not take place with respect for democratic values.
  Digitisation in education also requires vigilance from another perspective. Big private players play an important part (among other things in issuing digital micro-credentials, one of the courses of action in the European Education Area). Some private players do not need to meet a quality framework like that of adult education or other forms of education. This leads to an unlevel playing field.

5 Comments to several planned courses of action

5.1 Green and digital Europe[13]

5.1.1 'Digital' is not synonymous with 'sustainable'

The Vlor appreciates that the Communication strongly emphasises sustainability, also within the framework of the 'Green Deal'. Attention to sustainability can have various forms. There can be attention to green products, supporting the local economy, for instance. Greening may also mean that greening the economy is prepared for within labour market-oriented degree programmes, and that attention is paid to projects focused on this. The Vlor also appreciated that the European Union intends to promote greening the education infrastructure in collaboration with such institutions as the European Investment Bank.

In the Communication, it is indicated there will be a Council Recommendation on 'Education for environmental sustainability' in 2021, and that there are plans for a competence framework. The Vlor looks forward to further development of the policy line concerning sustainability in future EU policy.

It is surprising that both lines of policy are combined in a single pillar ('the twin transitions'). 'Digital' is not synonymous with 'sustainable' or 'green'. By putting both objectives under the same header, the Commission seems to suggest as much.

5.1.2 Mobility in relation to sustainability

Stimulating a green and sustainable attitude is much wider than the question of how to put mobility into practice. In this advice, however, the Vlor wants to express its concern that physical mobility is getting under pressure as a result of considerations of sustainability.

In the Communication, sustainability and mobility are described as opposites. Reality is more subtle, though: digital working and learning consume a lot of energy, for instance. The Vlor advocates a wider view: with sustainable development, ecological, economic and social interests are in ideal balance. In this respect, the Vlor refers to the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. This global agenda has five essential components, the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership, and Peace.[14]

The balance between mobility and sustainability is a major challenge of course, especially if social inclusion is a priority too. 'Flight shame', for instance, is not desirable: in certain circumstances, air travel is the cheapest option; advising against air travel would mean excluding certain groups from mobility. Virtual mobility is currently necessary because of the corona crisis. It is good that with respect to the future the combination of virtual and physical is stimulated, but it should not lead to replacing physical mobility with a virtual solution. The Vlor continues to emphasise the added value of physical mobility and encounter.

5.2 Geopolitical dimension

For three new major networks, the Union also wants to establish a link with the geopolitical agenda. All of this is still in its infancy and will be developed in further detail in the future. The

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[13] European Commission (2020). *Supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training.* Brussels: European Commission.
[14] United Nations (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals*.

Vlor appreciates that the Union broadens its outlook on education, and it makes some recommendations.

5.2.1 Cooperation with global strategic partners

There is a focus on strengthening cooperation with global strategic partners. It is positive that the EU wants to cooperate from its own priorities, knowledge, and framework of values, but the Vlor insists it wants to do this in synergy with other international institutions, as these organisations have more expertise for certain niches (for instance, Council of Europe for diploma recognition).

5.2.2 Mobility to non-European destinations

The geopolitical dimension can be an opportunity to increase diversity in destinations for exchange. The direct EU neighbours are less popular destinations for this (e.g., Caucasus, Central Asia, Ukraine, the countries south of the Mediterranean). The attention to the geopolitical dimension provides opportunities for approaching these countries with an open mind and going through certain learning pathways with them and exchanging these in a useful way.

Especially if the dimension is extended outside Europe within Erasmus+, it has to be safeguarded that the financing mechanisms are mutually adjusted within the actions of the programme. The same applies to synergy with other financing programmes like Horizon and Digital Europe. Via various channels, institutions can request financing, but they need to have grasped the processes of all of the various financing programmes, and this is quite difficult if there is insufficient mutual adjustment.

5.3 Higher education

Where higher education is concerned, the Communication is not really surprising. Via the Bologna process, higher education has developed further in international cooperation. However, much is still unclear with respect to this pillar too. It is important that the European Commission clearly indicates what it means, before the Vlor can take a well-founded position.

A specific example:
The interpretations of the European Degree concept can vary considerably. Is this a type of label, or is it a supranational body that should make statements on the recognition of diplomas, linked with quality assurance? The extent of the ambitions of the Commission is unclear. On the basis of the Communication text, it is impossible to tell.

The Vlor expresses its appreciation for the initiatives of the Commission but also calls for caution. It is positive that diploma recognition receives attention. After all, European citizens expect that the EU takes measures in this respect. It is true that as to issuing joint diplomas institutes of higher education in the EU want to go beyond what is currently possible within the practical and regulatory context. A new impetus is therefore definitely welcome; discontinuing existing dynamics would be undesirable. Until now, however, placing certification outside the higher education institutions has always been avoided in European decision-making. Now, it looks as though the Commission sets itself up as a 'substitute' for the institutions, whereas the European Commission does not have the required expertise to accredit degrees. There is the risk that we evolve to a two-tier system of diplomas at a European level and diplomas at a national level. This is a major step and its desirability has not been established yet, taking into account the concerns on the division of competencies and the subsidiarity principle. Here, the Vlor refers to the European Approach: it is not sufficient in itself to realise a 'European Degree', but it is a good example of how steps can be taken that take the limits of subsidiarity into account.

Where the relationship between the European Education Area and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is concerned, the Vlor calls for as much synergy as possible. Many topics are discussed in both. Countries that are a member of the EHEA, fall by the wayside in certain respects, which causes tensions. In addition, the Commission seems to consider the European Education Area a source of inspiration to the wider EHEA. In the European Education Area, all other sectors are also involved in education, which are not or hardly familiar with cooperation Bologna-style. This makes it difficult to take steps forward in the European Education Area which go beyond the cooperation currently already in place within the EHEA.

With respect to the 'enabling initiatives', the Vlor calls for vigilance to ensure that the resources do not always end up with the big players, for instance via the network of European Universities. It is essential that also the smaller higher education institutions can participate in internationalisation initiatives in a fully-fledged, proper way.

5.4 Micro-credentials

One of the eye-catching actions in the 'Inclusion and Gender Equality' section is the development of a European approach of 'micro-credentials'.

Micro-credentials are part of the Skills Agenda. *'The new initiative will support the quality, transparency, and use of micro-credentials throughout the EU. Together with all parties involved, the Commission wants to develop European quality and transparency standards, investigate how micro-credentials are included in quality frameworks, and make these visible in Europass.'* Micro-credentials are also part of the European Education Area, where the emphasis is on higher education as well as on re-skill and upskill in VET and lifelong learning.

The Commission is planning a proposal for a Council recommendation in the fourth quarter of 2021. European actions should support European confidence in micro-credentials, and by 2025 Member States have to aim at taking all steps required for a wider use, transferability, and recognition of these micro-credentials.

At this moment, the Vlor cannot formulate any recommendations on micro-credentials yet, as there are still too many uncertainties. The Council sees opportunities in developing a framework concerning micro-credentials in aiming at more inclusion and equal education opportunities, and it appreciates that with respect to micro-credentials the Union thinks in wider terms beyond higher education.

6 Structural dialogue with representative education stakeholders

In previous advice, the Vlor urged commitment among education stakeholders in the various phases of the policy processes. The term 'education stakeholders' should be understood in a wider meaning: social partners, education providers, parents, students, pupils, etc. Involving representative stakeholders, as is the case in a strategic advisory council, provides absolute added value.

The Vlor wants the European Union to have an even stronger focus on more active commitment of stakeholders in the policy preparation and execution at a European level. The consultation is not to be restricted to the social partners in the social and economic committee and the Member States. The education community, too, needs to have a say in the policy processes. In addition to

European umbrella organisations of education, the European network of education councils could certainly also play a part as a channel for translating advice from education councils with the European policy-makers. All in all, however, it is still very unclear on the basis of which criteria umbrella organisations of stakeholders are consulted for working groups and when they are asked for input.[15]

The Vlor is concerned that due to pressure of the crisis, certain attainments in the democratic process may come under pressure. For instance, the teacher unions were not interviewed in the course of the European Semester process this time, because of the high degree of urgency and the focus on economic recovery. In times of crisis, this is appreciated, but it should not set a precedent.

It is important that education stakeholders also have their say in the governance of the European Education Area. On page 17 of the Communication, a steering board for the European Education Area is referred to. In cooperation with the Member States, the composition and working methods of this steering board will be laid down by June 2021. Education councils, as the representatives of wide education, are precisely the organisations that might play a useful part here. The Vlor urgently calls for a representation of the European Network of Education Councils in the steering board.

At a Flemish level, the Vlor is the requesting party to be consulted in a timely and regular manner in the run-up to the Belgian EU Chairmanship (2024) and to be involved in the preparations. An evaluation of the 'enabling framework' has been planned to take place halfway through the decade. Possibly, this evaluation will be planned during the Belgian EU Chairmanship in 2024.[16]

Apart from his plea for the commitment of representative stakeholders, the council regrets that the European Commission has not organised a public consultation in the preparation of this Communication.

7 Financing

An ambitious plan can only be realised with the help of ambitious financing. In this sense, the Vlor regrets that, although the eventual budget for Erasmus+ has increased, it is considerably lower than the budget proposed by the Commission. It would certainly be helpful, if the Commission makes clear which other financing sources education can use for realising certain Education Area objectives.

In its first advice on European cooperation in education and training, the Vlor indicated it appreciates that over the years the Union has defined financing education systems as an individual objective. The Vlor argues for strengthening this policy, among other things by finding out if a benchmark can be developed for the investments in the education system. This

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[15] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.

[16] Flemish Parliament (2020). *Beleids- en begrotingstoelichting Onderwijs en Vorming. Begrotingsjaar 2021*. 'I monitor the preparations of the Belgian chairmanship of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2024 closely. While doing so, I devote myself to an ambitious Belgian education programme with sufficient attention to the Flemish priorities. The focus is on improving education quality and digitisation of our compulsory education, adult education, and higher education.'

benchmark will urge governments to continue to invest in education and to do so with public resources.[17]

At the same time, the Vlor is concerned about the freedom of education: will a (European) government that invests more also have more control? Will this government also expect results that are linked to quantitative objectives? Monitoring via benchmarks can stimulate cooperation, which is fine, but the Vlor calls for safeguarding that freedom of education is not jeopardised.

8   What about Erasmus+?

Erasmus+ will have to finance a large part of the European Education Area. The budget and how the budget of the new programme will be divided is not yet perfectly clear. Where this aspect is concerned, the Vlor refers to the most recent advice of 28 June 2018 on the new Erasmus programme.[18] As in 2018, the Vlor continues to call for permanent efforts to offer underrepresented groups the best possible opportunities for international mobility.

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[17] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over de Europese samenwerking na 'Education and Training 2020'*, 26 September 2019.
[18] Flemish Education Council, General Council. *Advies over het nieuwe Europese programma Erasmus*, 28 June 2018.

APPENDIX

The major benchmarks from ET2020, with the results versus the benchmarks at an EU level in the recently published ET monitor (source: the page of the European Commission[19]). In the next column, the major benchmarks proposed in the European Education Area, to be realised by 2030 (source: the Communication on a European Education Area).

Benchmarks in ET2020	Result in the ET2020 monitor (state of affairs 2019)	Proposed benchmarks in EEA
At least 95% of all children should receive pre-school education.	94.8%	At least 98% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.
Less than 15% of all 15-year-olds may score insufficient for reading, arithmetic, and science.	22.5% for reading 22.9% for arithmetic 22.3% for science	The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%. NEW: The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%.
A maximum of 10% of early school leavers among all 18- to 24-year-olds	10.2%	The share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification should be 90%.
At least 40% of 30- to 34-year-olds should have a higher education diploma.	40.3%	The share of 30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 50%.
At least 15% of all adults should participate in some form of learning.	10.8%	By 2022, 50% of adults annually participate in learning. (HOWEVER: other interpretation, and this benchmark is actually from the Skills Agenda.)
At least 82% of all graduates (20- to 34-year-olds with at least a secondary education diploma) should have found a	80.9%	No benchmark in the EEA communication; targets on employability *are* referred to in the Skills Agenda.

[19] European Commission (2020). *Education and Training Monitor 2020.* Brussels: European Commission.

job between one and three years after graduation.		