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A new range of competencies to meet new teaching challenges

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The use of the word 'new' twice in the heading of this contribution suggests that times have changed and that today teaching (education, training etc.) as well as teachers (educators, trainers etc.)[1] find themselves in a situation that is substantially different to what went on before: namely a situation requiring special consideration. At first glance, this suggestion seems justified: important developments and demanding problems are seen in this area today and we are paying growing attention to teaching and teacher issues at the institutional, national and European levels. When considered more extensively, our heading provokes some inherent questions. *What has changed so profoundly that allows us to speak today about 'new teaching challenges'? What are these 'new teaching challenges'?*

Teaching has changed

Education, in particular *quality teaching and learning*, has become even more important in the life of an individual. Today it is not only our professional careers but also our active roles in society and personal development that depend more than ever on good schools and good teachers. Currently, teaching and learning, as formalised in modern education systems, seem to incorporate two fascinating ideas of the 18th century: enlightenment and democracy. Is this in fact true? On average, individuals enter the education system earlier and stay in it for a longer time – actually, for the duration of their lives. No one is excluded from education (in principle); everyone profits from it (in principle). It is very difficult

[1] The author is aware of the terminological complexity regarding the terms 'teacher', 'educator', 'trainer' etc. In this text, 'teacher' is used as a generic term encompassing all possible variations seen within the 'teaching profession'.

and risky to live without education (in practice). From today's point of view, it is also unimaginable that education could be a voluntary activity (or an activity for elites only); it has become a true necessity and an obligation for all people. We live in an era of mass lifelong learning (i.e. institutionalised, but not necessarily always formal learning). The understanding of compulsory education has changed, not only when observed from the perspective of how long (must) young people 'go to school'. In the compulsory education of today, young people are not simply expected to spend time but they (must) acquire the key competencies necessary for an active and productive life as well as for lifelong learning.

Basic literacy and numeracy for all – a foundation of modern civilisation and an ambitious aim of education systems of the 19th and 20th centuries – remain the *key competencies*, yet the scope of the key competencies has expanded extremely. Today, we see it as self-evident that competence in foreign languages is almost as important as in one's mother tongue. Competence in science and technology is not limited to technicians and engineers but – at certain level – it is important for everyone; digital competence in particular. We live in a very different world to yesterday, surrounded at every instant by the artefacts of modern technology. On the other hand, social, cultural and civic competencies are also becoming ever more important in our increasingly complex and complicated societies. Last but not least, there is a strong consensus that learning to learn should be regarded as one of the key competencies. In short, there is a lot of work for teachers and schools, but not just for them.

Education is a necessity and obligation yet not every individual can realise it. In an era of mass education, we strive to act against *school failure*. Dropouts from schools have started to represent a problem almost unknown before. There are other similar modern 'inventions' which aim at bringing a learner from failure to success: special education for those with learning disabilities, for learners with all kinds of special needs, for those belonging to disadvantaged and marginal social groups, minorities, immigrants and refugees etc. Success in schooling is today, together with good health and a happy family life, one of the highest individual wishes and expectations, but it can also be understood as an extreme external pressure on an individual. All in all, it is no surprise that failure in school is experienced so frequently today, that it can be experienced as a trauma at the individual level and that a complex 'industry' has grown up in order to service it (often for good money).

Unfortunately, education is not a voluntary activity any more, but – fortunately – it is also no longer restricted to just a few. It is not a hobby (or perhaps only in very rare cases) and, therefore, people who start education at various levels and in different contexts need much more assistance and help than traditionally. Again, a lot of work for teachers and schools, but not just for them.

Teaching has changed. It cannot be simplified any more to basic information written on a blackboard with a piece of chalk. In fact, this change is not from yesterday and does not only characterise our

decade. Many surveys have been conducted on this phenomenon and many books have been written. Today we are challenged by it in a new way: we have to respond to the new reality with a new policy.

Teachers have changed

Yet, just as the subject of learning is a *learner,* the subject of teaching is a *teacher*. In this paper, we focus on the latter and leave the former to be considered more in details next time. It sounds like an obvious truth if we say that teachers and/or the teaching profession in general have also changed. We »must improve the ways in which teachers and trainers are supported as their role changes, and as public perceptions of them change« (Council…, 2002: 15).

In modern societies teachers (as a generic term) form an important part of the active labour force. »On average in OECD countries teachers constitute about 2.6% of the total labour force and teaching is the largest single employer of graduate labour« (OECD, 2005: 27). »At present the Union counts close to six million teachers (2003) «(Commission..., 2006: 69). However, it should not be forgotten that this strong professional group has been – and still is – very *heterogeneous*. In all our languages (and, of course, not only in languages) we encounter certain problems when we differentiate between 'teachers' (as a specific term) and 'non-teachers', i.e. 'other education and training profiles'. It is also possible to differentiate between 'teachers' and 'school staff', even though the division between the two categories can sometimes be very blurred. Sometimes, certain groups within the abstract 'teaching labour force' identify themselves more easily as 'linguists', 'mathematicians', 'chemists', 'historians', 'psychologists' etc. than as 'generic teachers' (who teach languages, maths etc.). In addition, there have been traditional rifts between e.g. teachers of elementary schools (or those in kindergartens) and teachers in general upper-secondary schools, while teachers – and trainers – in vocational schools have always been some kind of a 'third group'.

Today, these rifts are losing their sharpness (but they still exist); regardless of the different schools where teachers from different 'teaching labour force' groups work, their status is today more similar than in the past (however, it is often heard that it is 'devaluated'). Further, in many countries they can transfer under certain conditions from one type of school to another and, finally, they are often organised within the same unions. Despite a high level of heterogeneity among teachers there are certain indicators that the perception of teaching as a single profession is growing in our societies today.

The work of teachers has changed substantially as educational and pedagogical ideas have evolved (not to mention changes in culture in general). The traditional view saw the teacher as a 'Master' behind a chair or in front of a blackboard with a textbook in one hand and a grade book in the other. The

'Master' was closed off alone with kids in a classroom without much assistance and/or co-operation from the 'outside' (there was only interference from 'above'). Today, teaching is increasingly a *team activity* and an *activity performed in a partnership* between a school and its environment (noting that interferences can also persist). This is an important change; it deeply affects teachers' work and makes it much more complex yet it also influences the ways their initial and continuous education and training is organised.

At the start of this decade, authors of the *Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe* stressed that »substantial changes of the context of education and training (e.g. changed values, globalization of life and economy, organisation of labour, the new information and communication technology) have an impact on the professional tasks and roles of the teaching profession and call for more substantial reforms of education and training in general […], and teacher education in particular« (Buchberger, Campos, Kallós, Stephenson, 2000: 3). The *Green Paper* and a number of other studies have demonstrated that the preparation of teachers for their work, that is, a complex process of initial and continuous education and training (plus induction in some national systems), has substantially changed during the last two or three decades.

The main result of this change is that teaching is today predominantly a *graduate profession*. The more and more complex work in schools demands that a teacher takes professional decisions in an autonomous way; teacher is no longer a 'technician' who only cares about the transmission of facts and truths and not about the education process as such. This new position calls for an advanced level of teachers' education and training as this is the only assurance of the necessary *autonomy of teaching*.

At the same time, many countries have started to confront the phenomenon of the *ageing of teachers*. New generations gradually replace previous ones; according to statistical surveys the extent of this exchange will rise in the following years. Many countries have a difficulty retaining skilled teachers. »It is estimated that a minimum of one million new teachers will have to be recruited over the period 2005-2015 to satisfy replacement needs« (Commission..., 2006: 69). Such a process of a large-scale generational exchange brings, on one hand, the *risk* of an excessive interruption with professional traditions while, on the other, it gives an extra *opportunity* to address the issue of upgrading teachers' skills in a more straightforward way. It offers a unique chance to discuss European teacher education and training systems for the upcoming future.

Reconsidering teachers' work and teachers' competencies

Therefore, in their demanding work within modern societies, teachers are far from being mere transmitters of information, knowledge and established societal rules. After a long discussion – a discussion which will certainly continue and cannot be regarded as having finished – within the Commission's expert Working Group on Improving the Education of Teachers and Trainers (Commission…, 2004) and within a special Focus Group[2] formed at a later stage, a condensed definition was agreed and included in a background document for a European 'testing' conference on *Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications* (2005). This definition can also be used here. Today – and in the foreseen future – teachers' education should equip them with three 'clusters of competencies' in order to be able to work simultaneously »in three overlapping areas:

- *work with information, technology and knowledge;*
- *work with their fellow human beings – learners, colleagues and other partners in education; and*
- *work with and in society – at local, regional, European and broader global levels*« (Commission…, 2005: 3).

The *first area* has traditionally been recognised as the 'core' of the teaching profession. Depending on a teaching profile teachers need to be able to work with a variety of types of knowledge. Of course, they should have a high level of *knowledge and understanding* of their subject matter. Regardless of their different teaching subject(s), they should all be able to access, analyse and synthesise, reflect on and validate and, finally, to transmit knowledge, while making use of technology in general and ICT in particular ('generic teachers' competencies'). All of them should be able to make choices about the delivery of education (the autonomy of teaching). They should be able to organise teaching and learning in effective ways, to identify various learning needs of pupils and/or students and to guide and support them in their independent work and towards lifelong learning. Last but not least, they should be able to act as 'reflective practitioners', i.e. able to analyse their own professional work – together with their achievements and failures – in order to improve their own teaching strategies and practices as well as to develop a responsibility to produce new knowledge about education and training (e.g. in action research etc.).

The competencies presented in the *second area* reconfirm that the teaching profession cannot be – and should not be – reduced to the mere transmission of information and knowledge; it is also based on *values of social inclusion* and *care for individual development*. Teachers' work requires good knowledge and understanding of pupils, students and adult learners as individuals with specific abilities, interests and needs. Teachers need to be able to support them to develop their potential. Further, quality teaching

[2] For ethical and other reasons it should be noted here that the author was a member of this group and a co-author of the *Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications* (2005).

and learning is inseparable from collaborative team work with and among learners and other teachers and school staff but also with other partners outside the school; therefore, teachers should be able to fulfil these tasks and to develop the necessary communicative and co-operative skills and to demonstrate self-confidence when engaging with others.

Finally, the *third area* touches on a delicate range of issues inherent to the education process in general but which transcend the individual learner, classroom and even school. These issues *link the learner, teacher and school with society at large*. It is important to reiterate that today the teacher should be equipped with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills that empower them to act autonomously. A teacher as a 'technician' who cares only about the mechanical transmission of societal rules could be a cynical feature of contemporary democratic societies; on the other side, the 'neutral disregard' and ignorance of this link could not be less cynical. Teachers should be able to prepare pupils, students and adult learners for their respective roles in society. For that reason, teachers should understand the role of education in terms of exclusion/inclusion social dynamics; they should understand the diversity of learners' cultures and value systems and be able to reflect on the learning process from the equity point of view; they should be aware of the sociological and ethical dimensions of the knowledge society etc. They should be able to work effectively with parents, the local community and stakeholders in general and be aware that effective teaching and learning significantly improves the employment opportunities of graduates.

However, the reconsidering of teachers' work and teachers' competencies cannot occur outside real time and a real space. As we have already seen, new teaching challenges are not an 'exclusive' or 'hermetic' issue reserved for narrow expert which professionally deal with teacher education and training. On the contrary, they are rooted in and interlinked with global societal processes; they are important for all stakeholders and – directly or indirectly – for every citizen. A broad and open discussion of a new range of teaching competencies is today relevant and needed in all our countries, *at the national level*, to support the further development of the teacher education and training system. On the other hand, this discussion should also take the broader context into consideration – not only national diversities and traditions but also the fact that today national sub-systems like education cannot develop efficiently if they do not consider practices in a neighbourhood, on the continent and in the global context. Therefore, this discussion is also relevant and needed *at the European level*.

Competencies for a 'European teacher'

One of the most important arguments that says future teacher education and training in our countries should be discussed at the European level is linked to the fact that teachers in all our national systems of education are increasingly challenged by the 'European dimension'. From the start of compulsory education more than hundred years ago, a teacher has been perceived as a teacher within the *national context* (e.g. the language of instruction, traditions, history, identity, citizenship etc.). Parallel to this, teachers' colleges were to some degree more similar to police and military academies than to universities. From the 'outside', a lack of co-operation, distrust and even strong divisions and wars between European countries petrified these characteristics for a long time. Today, in the new circumstances, a teacher is also positioned within the *European context* (e.g. mobility, languages, histories, multiculturalism, multiple identities and citizenship etc.).

This challenge is sometimes and in certain contexts understood as a dilemma and hinders the faster development of the Europeanisation and internationalisation of teacher education as well as in the teaching professionalisation. With regard to 'older' professions and more internationalised fields of academic studies (e.g. medicine, engineering, science etc.), teacher education (could) lag behind if certain changes leading towards faster opening and internationalisation are not implemented. In the area of *Erasmus* mobility, students in teacher education are still quite rare and their number should be significantly increased in the future. There is another instrument, the *Comenius* programme, which already importantly stimulates teacher mobility and teachers' continuous professional training across European borders.

The issue of teachers' competencies today and in the future only remains partly answered if its 'European dimension' is not addressed. The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) recently focused on 'European teacher' in connection with a discussion of teachers' competencies; it is synthesised in a stimulating discussion paper (Schratz, 2005). The ENTEP started from the general view that a European teacher must have the same basic skills as any good teacher. Teachers work within a national framework, which emphasises the need for a national identity, and this position can also be taken as a basis for transnational awareness within European society. A 'European teacher' should not be understood as a concept which replaces – or places over or surmounts – a 'national teacher'; as we can read in an earlier draft of the ENTEP discussion paper, we should »not aim at creating the format of a 'European super teacher', but intend to point to European issues which are potentially of particular significance in future discussions«.

The ENTEP synthesis report (Schratz, 2005) lists a number of issues which challenge the picture of a 'good teacher' today. This list starts with the *European identity*, a widely discussed concept; within this concrete context this concept raises the awareness that a teacher is always rooted in a particular country, but at the same time she/he belongs to a greater European whole. '*European knowledge*', e.g. knowledge of other education systems but also of history (histories) etc., is again very important for the teaching profession today and tomorrow but it is not (yet) a characteristic of their initial education and training. *Multiculturalism* and *language competence* necessitate further tasks: teachers need to understand the multicultural and multilingual nature of European society. They work within it and with heterogeneous cultural and linguistic groups. They should see heterogeneity as valuable, respect any differences, speak more than one European language etc. The same importance should be assigned to the issue of (European) *citizenship,* subsuming solidarity with the citizens of other European countries and shared values such as respect for human rights, democracy and freedom. These considerations are already echoed in the *European Principles for Teacher Competencies* mentioned above (Commission…, 2005: 3).

This list also includes the issue of *professionalism* and stresses that a 'European teacher' should have »an education which enables him/her to teach in any European country« and which leads »towards a new professionalism with a European perspective (e.g. it does not restrict teaching practice to national boundaries)« (Schratz, 2005). European systems of teacher education and training have made huge progress in the last two to three decades. Teacher education has become an integral part of higher education. Approximately 10% of undergraduate students in Europe are today studying in the area statistically marked as 'education and teacher education'. As is broadly known, the Bologna Process has initiated the deep transformation of the whole of higher education. This transformation is now turning from policy development to implementation at institutional and disciplinary levels – and teacher education should not be excluded from it. The achievements and developments of previous decades should not be put at risk and teaching should not lag behind other professions based on academic studies.

Finally, the document put *quality measures* on this list as well. This is a core of the Bologna Process which aims at comparable studies, the faster (if not automatic) recognition of academic and professional qualifications, increased mobility and better employability across countries. These aims cannot be achieved without strengthening *mutual trust* between higher education systems and institutions, and mutual trust depends to the highest degree on quality standards and quality provision. Common European standards and guidelines in quality assurance were agreed in Bergen two years ago (2005); now, they are in the process of implementation at national levels. A real and very concrete implementation of European quality standards is taking place at the institutional level and this final

step demands that special provision is also made at the disciplinary and/or study area levels. This is again an important task for teacher education. Yet how should we approach it?

Quality teachers and quality teaching for Europe

We are building a common *European Area of Education*, even larger than the EU-27. For this purpose, educational policies at national levels should be effectively co-ordinated and supported at the European level in order to achieve ambitious goals by 2010 and to develop the common Area of Education also beyond 2010: Europe »recognized as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems«. Yet, these reformed systems of tomorrow should be »compatible enough to allow citizens to move between them« while »Europe will be open to cooperation for mutual benefits with all other regions«. These goals call for enormous work. The *Open Method of Co-ordination* provides tools to identify »shared concerns and objectives, the spreading of good practice and the measurement of progress« (Council…, 2002, 4-5). But this is not some sort of magic and should not be understood as such: even the best tools do not help much if they are not truly 'employed' – in understanding existing and various practices, improving them, implementing necessary changes and making overall real progress.

Our knowledge of other education systems is substantially better than e.g. ten years ago, and it is totally incomparable with the state of affairs 20 years ago. This is a result of increased co-operation and newly established co-ordination but also the outcome of comprehensive surveys and studies (Eurydice, 2002, 2003, 2004). Further, these systems are more compatible; this is a result of comparative approaches in policy development and decision-taking at the national level as well as of enhanced co-operation between the providers of teacher education at the institutional level. These systems continue to be diverse – and this is not a problem. The problem is that certain incompatibilities between systems persist. Several countries have already started to reform their teacher education systems by taking into consideration the special lessons learned from good practices in teacher education, but also the general recommendations of the Bologna Process. All of these are encouraging developments; nevertheless, it could happen that – without the effective co-ordination among the partners in this process – the final outcome will contain the same incompatible elements than today or may be even more.

The many discussions that have taken place at various levels in recent years now seem to be leading to an important landmark and offer a fresh policy synthesis. The development of *Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications* (2005), already used in some countries, and the Commission's recent proposal on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (2007) have a similar weight

for a particular area of teacher education as the Bergen decisions on an overarching qualification framework and on common standards and guidelines for quality assurance have had for European higher education as a whole. Is this an exaggeration?

It is an exaggeration in that the two Bergen documents have already been approved by all European ministers of education while a proposal on teacher education is at the start of a formal procedure in the European Parliament. Of course, it should not be forgotten that the Bergen documents and the Bologna Process as such refer to a 'large' Europe (EU-46), while the Commission's proposal on teacher education is directly addressed 'only' to the EU-27, but there is a high probability that its ideas and recommendations will be considered in much broader circle. In addition, while comparing European higher education in general with a special area of teacher education it should not be disregarded that teacher education is only a (small) part of national higher education systems and that the issue of teacher education cannot be resolved in the context of higher education only; it is inseparably intertwined with systems of (pre-tertiary) education, with continuous and lifelong learning etc.

The Commission's recent proposal on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*, observed within contemporary discussions on teacher education, makes an important shift: it moves this discussion to a point which is crucial for the further development of European higher education: *the issue of quality*. At the last Bologna summit in London (May 2007), European ministers welcomed the establishment of a European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies by a group of higher education stakeholders (the E4 Group). This was not their only decision, far from it, but it is extraordinarily important for the further development of European higher education systems in general and for special areas or fields within them – e.g. for teacher education.

European QA Agencies will now have an opportunity to apply for entry to the Register which will provide clear and reliable information about reliable and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. Several practicalities of setting up the Register are still to be made more precise, and several other points remain to be discussed and agreed, such as e.g. university autonomy in the free choice of evaluation or accreditation agency from the Register. Thus, the traditional logic of accrediting and evaluating higher education institutions and/or their programmes based on exclusive national responsibility is set to shift to the European level as well. This shift will surely have an enormous impact on quality regulations and quality higher education provision across European countries and will improve the strongly needed trust among them. The idea of a European Register is not totally new; a recommendation on this issue was adopted by EU bodies already in 2006 after two or three years of intensive expert discussion. Yet what is new is that this idea has passed a process of political

confirmation and that European countries – both the EU-27 as well as the EU-46 – are today politically and morally bound to implement it.

In this light, the importance of the proposal on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* is, hopefully, clearer. General standards – valid for higher education area as a whole – are strategically important but, on the other hand, to be implemented, they should be applied, transferred and 'translated' into specific areas and into specific disciplinary 'languages'. Even in these specific contexts, the importance of co-ordination among those responsible for the national systems – teacher education systems in this case – remains immense. Therefore, »a vision of a European teaching profession« with the following characteristics:

- »*it is well qualified profession: all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions*«;
- »*it is a profession of lifelong learners: teachers are supported to continue their professional development throughout their careers*«;
- »*it is a mobile profession: mobility is a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes*«; and
- »*it is a profession based on partnerships: teacher education institutions organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools* […] *and other stakeholders*« (Commission…, 2007: 12)

seems to be indispensable if national developments – based on »the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity« as one can read in the *Maastricht Treaty* (1991) – are expected to lead towards more compatible, efficient and quality systems of teacher education in Europe.

In line with these principles, a number of common policy steps should be addressed to improve the quality of teacher education: to develop teacher education and training as a lifelong task (at national, institutional and individual levels) in order to systematically support the necessary teacher competencies and skills, including the ability to reflect on their practice and develop new knowledge about education and training etc.

Instead of a conclusion: the key role of institutions

The quality of (future) teacher education in Europe largely depends on *national* vs. *European* co-operation and co-ordination – but not only this. At the Berlin conference of the Bologna Process (2003) it was clearly stated that »the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework«. This principle should also be applied to teacher education. In

implementing the agreed principles and guidelines, important work should always be done at the institutional level – not only within a particular national system (the co-operation of teacher education institutions and their stakeholders) but also between them.

There are many examples of *European institutional co-operation* today: e.g. the Tuning project, »the Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process«, which aims at 'tuning' or 'concerting' curricula in several study areas and in teacher education. Thus, the Tuning working group 'Education and Teacher Education' developed an »indicative« list of competencies »not intended to be either exhaustive or definitive« (Gonzales, Wagenaar, 2005, p. 82). This list was developed during the first phase of the project (2001-2003) in a consultation process with the main stakeholders – former students, employers and other academics. It contains key subject-specific as well as generic competencies. It is divided between teacher education and education sciences, two main sub-areas of higher education studies,[3] and structured along all three Bologna cycles. »Not all competencies will be fully developed at the end of first cycle studies and will continue to develop over the continuum of professional life, often focused on during periods of in-service education and training, but not necessarily developed in a context of formal education« (p. 83). In implementing the Bologna Process and in modernising their curricula, several European institutions of teacher education have already started to apply the Tuning recommendations. Of course, this is not a copy-paste procedure; many details – and also dilemmas – should be clarified and answered in a further run. Some of them will be most probably addressed also within the new institutional network on *Teacher Education Policy in Europe* (TEPE).[4]

The Tuning competencies developed for individual disciplinary fields are far more detailed than the general 'European Teacher Competencies' outlined above. Of course, they were not designed as a strategic 'European tool'; they are a specific result of the concrete co-operation of a number of higher education institutions from different European countries which provide teacher education and training programmes. We cannot provide a detailed analysis of this extensive list here (altogether 30 competencies; see pp. 83-86) but it should be stressed that – at least in principle – there is no substantial difference or contradiction between them; they share the same philosophy.

To achieve the ambitious goal – i.e., to increase »the quality of teaching« understood as a »key factor in determining whether the European Union can increase its competitiveness in the globalised world« (Commission…, 2007, p. 3) – the principles of *co-operation and partnership* should be stressed over and over. On the 'macro' level, it is very important that co-operation and trust between European countries

[3] »Many competences (generic and specific) are common to both teacher education and education sciences; some competences are specific to teacher education« (p. 83).

[4] See http://tepe.wordpress.com/.

and European institutions is improved in order to agree on feasible strategies for the future. On the 'micro' level, it is no less important that national authorities, in our case mainly ministries of education, co-operate as closely as possible with teacher education institutions, schools, teachers and other stakeholders. 'Transversal' co-operation and partnerships, such as e.g. institutional co-operation and/or their various projects within the *Lifelong Learning Programme*, will make these endeavours more firm and sustainable. We should also build concrete actions on these principles in order to achieve the ambitious European goals.

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