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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Europe 2020: Employment Policies
Vocational Training and Adult Education

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Boosting the European Alliance for Apprenticeships

22 June 2015, Riga

Short summary

PURPOSE OF THE EVENT:

The Riga event was a key moment for mobilising key stakeholders for a new boost of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAFA).

Around **300 participants** took part in the event. 187 participants registered for the afternoon session, in addition to 119 participants registered for Ministerial meeting in the morning of the same day. Participants included Heads of Delegations from Member States, EU EFTA and candidate countries, as well as EAfA stakeholders from businesses, business organisations, chambers, social partners, VET providers, youth and non-profit organisations and think tanks.

MAIN HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONFERENCE:

- Strong **support to the Alliance and mobilising momentum** coming from "45 newcomers" (see Annex 1): 38 new pledges (from currently 46 to 84), 7 new countries (IT, CZ and 5 EFTA and candidate countries AL, CH, NO, ME, TR). But also new Baltic Alliance "Declaration of Intent" signed by LT, LV and EE.
- Stakeholders pledges were in the following categories: 8 companies, 1 business organisation, 4 chambers, 4 European sectoral social partners, 7 national trade unions, 3 think tanks, 1 regional authority, 5 professional bodies, 5 non-profit-organisations.
- Lively and **novel** approach of afternoon session with around **20 apprentices** (female and male). Excellent combination of showcasing pledges and panel discussions.
- **Exhibition space** with a total of 10 stands from Nestlé and Alliance for YOUTH, Teachers' Trade Unions' stand, Siemens, WorldSkills, YouNet, the Austrian Economic Chambers (WKÖ), Bertelsmann Foundation, Cedefop, ETF, DG EMPL (EAfA and Drop'pin). Effective use of social media **with over 700 Tweets**.

OPENING SESSION, SIGNING OF NEW PLEDGES, APPRENTICES' SESSION, AND LAUNCH OF NEW ALLIANCE WEBSITE AND DROP' PIN

- Marita Seile (Latvian Minister for Education and Science) welcomed the Alliance event and highlighted the importance of enhancing the **prestige of VET, innovation and strategic partnerships**, as well as the introduction of a **bottom-up process** in Latvia involving companies and VET providers in Ministry decisions on VET. The government was also working on a motivation system for entrepreneurs to encourage apprenticeships.
- Marianne Thyssen (Commissioner, DG EMPL) presented the milestones of the EAfA event and pointed to the pressing need to get more companies, including SMEs on board to boost the provision of **apprenticeship supply**.
- EU social partners: Javier Calderon Beltran (Chair, BUSINESSEUROPE's Education and Training Working Group) emphasised the need to put in place the **right framework conditions** for companies to boost their engagement in apprenticeships, and the need to tackle negative perceptions. As examples of good partnerships he cited the Spanish employers' federation (CEOE) agreement with the Bertelsmann Foundation in Spain, and the launch of the GAN cooperation.
- Luca Visentini (Confederal Secretary, ETUC) supported the Alliance and noted the decline of apprenticeship supply in Europe due to **lack of attractiveness** for learners and companies, and called for enhancing the **quality** of apprenticeships through an EU quality framework on apprenticeships. **Pledges** were important, but help was needed to engage not only the largest organisations, but also the weaker ones like SMEs. He **was supportive of VET reforms**.
- During the signing of all new pledgers, including countries, companies and other stakeholders came on stage and their commitments were outlined during the session.
- During **the session dedicated to apprentices'** two apprentices (LV, DE) from Siemens presented the apprenticeship programme "Europeans@Berlin". The young people gave testimonials and expressed their **expectations** on the future of the Alliance, which included a **minimum wage for apprentices**. An apprentice (DE) from a construction SME (9 persons) briefly explained the specific case of “dual studies”, leading in his case to the double qualification as a mason (apprenticeship) and engineer (university studies).
- Detlef Eckert (Director, DG EMPL): presented the new EAfA website, including its improved search functions and contact information. With the support of the Commissioner, he then launched Drop'pin which was linked to the EAfA site and aimed at giving concrete offers to young people. It is a metasite aggregating offers and will become multilingual.

PRESENTATION OF SUCCESS STORIES:

Speakers: Holger Schwannecke (Secretary General, ZDH, Confederation of Skilled Crafts Germany); Matthew Thomson (CE, Fifteen Cornwall; Project Fifteen – A recipe for success, ESF project); Anita Lice (Adviser, Employers' Confederation of Latvia); Vita Zunda (Q-Placements Project Manager); Andrea Nigg (Head of Marketing and Communications, Global Apprenticeships Network); Jos de Goey (President, Worldskills Europe); Norbert Schoebel (EAfA Team Leader, DG EMPL)

- Mr Schwannecke presented ZDH initiatives on raising **attractiveness of apprenticeships for SMEs** in the crafts sector, in particular the image campaign started in 2010 to attract more young people to the skilled crafts professions. He demonstrated the importance of up-to-date technical skills and the evolution of the sector.
- Mr Thomson: 'Project 15' was aimed at giving **socially disadvantaged young people** the possibility of acquiring skills through WBL in the food sector (VET college and company training) and provided high employability (90% employed now). The initiative uses a **creative funding concept** with national and private sector funding, ESF and ERDF (Region Star Award 2014)
- Ms Lice: presented **Erasmus+** funded National Agency project on apprenticeships in the Baltic States, which includes the participation of social partners and focuses on **peer learning**. The on-going project also formed the basis for the Declaration of Intent letter signed by the three Baltic States.
- Ms Zunda: presented the EU funded Q-VET Placements projects focusing on quality assurance with a strong **VET enterprise cooperation** across four countries (LV, SI, NL, ES), which involved VET providers and Chambers.
- Ms Nigg: highlighted the **global dimension** of apprenticeships and the work by GAN, which was a business driven network. The network was broader than apprenticeships and also included internships and other WBL.
- Mr De Goey: explained the role of WorldSkills and Euroskills competitions in raising attractiveness for skills.
- Mr Schoebel: presented **new communication tools** of the Alliance (first-online survey, new brochure, new video clip, promotion material e.g. T-Shirts, fortune teller) and next steps (call for proposals on the support for SMEs tbc, Cedefop conference, NETWBL conference, study to monitor progress).

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel 1 - How to get companies on board, particularly SMEs?

Participants: James Calleja (Director, Cedefop), Marie Dousava (Vice President Sales & Customer Management, Nestlé Europe, ERT), Ben Butters (Eurochambres), Lone Folmer Berthelsen (VET Director, Confederation Danish Industry), Sarah Daepf (Project Manager, State Secretariat for Education Research and Innovation, SERI, Switzerland)

- Ms Dousava: highlighted the **leading role** of Nestlé through its different initiatives on apprenticeships for employability of young people, as well as the importance for companies to invest in this to develop skills and talents. Nestlé is working to **establish apprenticeship schemes in countries that don't have a tradition** for this, mostly in Eastern and Southern Europe, which includes cooperation with local government.
- Ms Berthelsen: Denmark has a dual system, but over the last 10 years there has been **more school-based led VET** due to political reforms using VET as education for young people not being ready for taking and education, **which has led to companies withdrawing** from investing in apprenticeships. Therefore they have been lobbying for reforming the system. Need to focus in each country on the need for skilled workers and investing in motivated and competent young people, because the possibilities of recruiting skilled workers across countries will be limited in the future due to lack of workforce all over Europe because of demographic changes.
- Mr Butters: the question was what can EAfA do for SMEs and not vice versa. It requires a business case and for micro or small businesses it is necessary **to lighten administrative and cost burdens and** involve chambers of commerce or other **intermediaries to mitigate the burden** for apprenticeships. The focus should be on ensuring capacity building collaboration between key actors in apprenticeship first mover countries and those countries upgrading their approach. A new **EU target for more WBL within VET** should also be set.
- Ms Daepf: Switzerland **does not give financial incentives to companies** for apprentices. The system is very **permeable**. In the last few years it has become difficult for the companies to find enough apprentices, mainly in blue collar jobs, as those are physically very demanding. There is a clearly defined legal system which involves social partners and sectoral organisations, strategic decisions are taken in consensus with all partners involved, among which are also SMEs. If small companies are too small to train, there are **training consortia** which can receive project support from government.
- Mr Calleja: explained the role of Cedefop acting as **a catalyst for the Alliance**, informed about plans for **conference in November on SMEs** to foster cooperation with business on apprenticeships and promote partnership and culture for apprenticeships.

- During the discussion, Mr Van Ijsselmuiden, **Dutch government representative**, stressed importance of economic situation, and **suggested to look at how to build on ET 2020 VET working group guidelines during the Dutch EU Presidency.**

Panel 2 – Expectations from companies, business organisations and social partners and next steps for EAfA

- Celia Moore (IBM, Chair of Board, CSR Europe), Dorthe Andersen (Rapporteur, European Economic and Social Committee), Philippe Perfetti (Head of Unit, APCMA / UEAPME Representative), Sylvain Lefebvre (Deputy General Secretary, Industrial European Trade Union), Simon Marsh (Vice-President, European Chemical Employer's Group, ECEG, Steering Committee), Ulrich Pätzold (European Construction Industry Federation, FIEC)
- Ms Moore: for the ICT sector she stressed that the Alliance has to help **close the skills gap**, ensuring the right type of skills, drive integration of business and education. She highlighted the "E-skills for Jobs" declaration in Riga in March 2015, as **digital skills** were vital. She stressed the need to **involve CEOs** which will be done with the "**Pact for Youth**" to be **launched by CSR Europe** later this year in Brussels.
- Mr Marsh: for the **chemical sector** information provision is important for employers, apprentices, career advisers, schools etc., as well as to promote social partnership in governance of partnership schemes. **Drop'pin was highlighted as a fantastic tool** to be used by companies and stakeholders. He called for an **annual report** to map **future targets** and for promoting apprenticeships through **supply chain**.
- Mr Paetzold: welcomed DG EMPL's EAfA and DG GROW's special support for apprenticeships in **construction sector**. Emphasised **dual element**, need to involve social partners in curricula, and need for Europe-wide exchange of successful practical examples at all levels, including local and regional networks.
- Mr Lefebvre: the realities of different sectors needed taking into account. It was essential to bring education and business worlds closer together and focus more on **quality** and **quality contracts**.
- Mr Perfetti: **make it simple** and **make it local** since over 90% of companies were small or micro companies. It was difficult for SMEs to be part of the Alliance, thus trade organisations or other intermediary bodies played an important role. Alliance should be **more visible** and there should be **reports on national or local Alliances**. The VET ET 2020 WG **guidelines** should be well used.
- Ms Andersen: Expressed concern about ongoing negative **image of VET**, which could be overcome by collecting more **data, measuring reform progress** and analysing **what works locally or in different regions**, including the quality of different work-based learning systems, exchange information.

- During the discussions, Ms Marin, Basque Country stressed the importance of working **through innovation** to get SMEs on board, and also the need to get more women on board.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Mr Eckert (DG EMPL): expressed satisfaction with the **successful mobilising** event in Riga, which gave the Alliance a real boost for more follow-up work.
- Next steps should entail **setting the right framework**, such as the legal setting and quality systems, including for VET trainers. SMEs required support for example through intermediary organisations, and the private sector should continue to make more concrete offers.
- The **momentum** needed to be maintained, both through the **Riga 2020 VET conclusions**, and with the **boost of the Alliance**, which were both **mutually supportive**.