

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE EFTA STATES

Ref. 1096448
15 January 2010

EFTA Working Group on Education, Training and Youth EFTA Working Group on Research and Development

EEA EFTA COMMENT ON THE "EU 2020" STRATEGY

COM(2009)647

The EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) welcome the consultation document on the "EU 2020" strategy, and thank the Commission for providing stakeholders with the opportunity to comment on it. The EEA EFTA States look forward to playing an active part in the preparations, implementations and follow-up of this Strategy.

The EEA EFTA States share many of the challenges and concerns expressed in the document. We agree that knowledge has an important role to play in ensuring a transition to a new sustainable social market economy that is smarter, greener, and built on innovation. Furthermore, growth and employment are clearly dependent upon the qualifications and competence of the working force.

We believe the thematic key driver "Creating value by basing growth on knowledge" is a correct approach. The potential of education, research, innovation and creativity must be harnessed by, for instance: developing universities into even better engines for knowledge and growth, preventing early school leaving, and pooling research resources. This key driver is well in line with the main priorities of the research and education policies of the EEA EFTA States. We see this first key driver as a basis for the two others.

There is a clear need for a more effective European framework to improve the conditions for enhanced mobility. This is particularly important for small countries. Therefore, more emphasis should in particular be put on cross-sector mobility between industry and academia, but also between Europe and other regions of the world.

The EEA EFTA States also take part in and make financial contributions to many of the EU programmes and activities that will be important when facing future challenges, such as the programmes in research, education and innovation. We look forward to continued cooperation with the EU both on policy development based on exchange of best practice and in developing the relevant instruments and programmes required to fulfil the potential of the abovementioned driver and to achieve the set goals.

We especially recognise the need for increased policy coordination and joint European efforts in order to be able to create a common European Research Area. Coordination efforts and the development of the necessary partnerships should also include those countries associated to the Framework Programme and be as open and transparent as possible. This would maximise the effects and benefits of cooperation, and is in line with the emphasis in the consultation document on the need for Europe/the EU to be open to the world. We believe there are many potential

benefits associated with increased pan-European research cooperation. The objectives of EU 2020 are for instance linked to global challenges which are also given high priority in the policies of the EEA EFTA States.

The EEA EFTA States are strongly committed to taking part in the process towards a European Research Area and to this end we are already involved in a series of activities and instruments (cf. development of Joint Programming, research infrastructures, European Technology Platforms, Joint Technology Initiatives, EIT etc).

We also support an even broader approach under the heading “the European Knowledge Area”, encompassing research, education and innovation policy and activities. This would provide for increased synergies and better goal attainment.

In this regard, we welcome the emphasis on inclusive societies where lifelong learning, among others, is a key element in avoiding long-term unemployment leading to loss of human capital. However, in striving for inclusion we wish to stress the importance of creating equal opportunities for all in the development of a European Knowledge Area, in particular by taking account of gender issues so as to ensure the equal rights for women and men to acquire a high level of education and training.

We would also like to stress the importance of rebuilding a labour market that on the one hand provides security through lifelong learning and appropriate social protection, and on the other hand enhances the flexibility of labour markets.

Offering researchers access to world-class infrastructure in Europe implies significant investments. The EEA EFTA States believe it is of great importance to secure funding of the running costs and a continuous modernisation of the installations. Open access to advanced facilities should be the general rule. These facilities must also be scaled to allow for several scientists working together or in parallel.
