

Dear President Ursula von der Leyen,

Dear President Charles Michel,

Dear Prime-Minister Andrej Plenković,

Dear Chancellor Angela Merkel,

In respect of the post COVID-19 recovery fund and the updated seven-year EU budget, presented by the European Commission on 27 May, and in the perspective of the upcoming discussions at European Council level, **we call on you to agree on massive public investments in education across Europe and to push forward the integration of education policy at EU level as a central political priority.**

The reconstruction plan is, indeed, an unprecedented sign of European solidarity, intended to help those states that are most in need after the COVID 19 pandemic. **The Commission's proposal falls, however, short in addressing education challenges.**

With regards to the EU flagship programme Erasmus+, we find it unacceptable that the European Commission now proposes a significantly lower budget than what was initially foreseen in May 2018. **We expect Commission President von der Leyen to keep her promise from July 2019 to triple the Erasmus+ budget.**

Without the necessary investments in education, #NextGenerationEU remains only a nice term as it does not take the needs of our next generations into consideration.

In the midst of the current crisis, we have observed that education systems all over Europe are neither as resilient nor as inclusive as they should be. In times of COVID-19, where schools had to close their doors, education mostly came to a stop. The reasons for that are manifold: The necessary infrastructure and equipment are missing. Stable, safe and accessible e-learning platforms are lacking. Children do often not receive sufficient support while parents are unfortunately not always prepared to handle home-schooling activities. Teachers often have difficulties to manage the schooling situation at distance due to a lack of skills.

The COVID-19-pandemic has shown us that our education systems urgently need a systematic upgrade. In the European Commission staff document on Europe's recovery needs it is clearly stated that the social infrastructure investment needs for education and lifelong learning are significant, which means around 15 billion euro per year. Thus, the Corona crisis has shed light on an old problem: Over the last couple of years, national governments have not made sufficient investments in our schools and educational establishments.

While education remains nationally focused, **the challenges European education systems have to confront now and over the coming years, such as digitization and the transformation of our economy, do not know borders.** Therefore, the fact that education is one of the European

Union's subsidiary policy areas should definitely not prevent us from striving for **more coordinated and cooperative action in this policy area**, which is of fundamental importance to all EU member states and our future generations.

In this respect, **education must be put at the heart of a successful recovery**, to the benefit of our young generation, our society and economy. We consider it, therefore, necessary to

- specify the allocations for education in the post-COVID-19 EU recovery plan;
- clarify the amount of the new Recovery and Resilience Facility being allocated to education;
- increase the Erasmus+ budget, according to the requests made by the European Parliament;
- highlight the education priorities and objectives in the European Semester process and in the national specific recommendations and link them with the recovery instruments;
- increase public investments in education, at EU and national level, including through better use of EU funds by member states; exclude investments in education from the deficit calculation and from the Economic governance review

Further to the promotion of investments in education at all levels, we believe that many challenges on the subject matter have to be tackled as well. In that regard, we would like you to take note of the recently adopted **S&D position paper “European Education Area: Our reality by 2025”**, which provides a snapshot of the necessary demands from a **Socialist perspective to make the completion of a European Education Area a success.**

We call on all European institutions to work together on these priorities and come forward with concrete solutions. In this regard, we reiterate the need for the European Commission to **accelerate the preparation and implementation of the European Action Plan on Digital Education and the Skills Agenda for Europe** as well as to **move forward with the creation of the European Education Area** designed to build a level playing field and to increase the standards in the field of education across Europe.

Education is the most powerful tool shaping our societies, our economies and our future. This is the mindset that must guide us all when we build policies and select priorities – in normal times, but especially in times of crisis.

Respectfully,

Iratxe Garcia

(President of the S&D Group)

Ismail Ertug

(Vice-President of the S&D Group in charge of education matters)

Petra Kammerevert

(CULT coordinator of the S&D Group)

Victor Negrescu

(Rapporteur on the CULT Report on Shaping Digital Education policy)