

TODAYS NEWS

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European  
Commission

# OUTCOME OF COMMISSION MIDDAY BRIEFING

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## [Commission welcomes OECD report underlining high return on investment in education](#)

The European Commission today welcomed the launch of "Education at a Glance 2010", a new report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which underlines the need for governments to support world-class quality in their education systems to ensure long-term growth and to fight unemployment. 21 EU countries are covered by the report, which draws on data collected jointly with Eurostat and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The report looks at what is spent on education, how education systems operate and what results are achieved. For the Commission, the report provides evidence and data in support of its Europe 2020 education targets to reduce early school leaving and to boost university education.

## [ICT research: preserving Europe's digital data for future generations](#)

Tools developed using EU funds to ensure that digitally stored data can be preserved, accessed and understood for the indefinite future are now available in the form of open source software. The EU's CASPAR (Cultural, Artistic and Scientific knowledge for Preservation, Access and Retrieval) research programme involved researchers from the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Israel, Italy and the UK. This work complements initiatives such as Europeana, the European digital library. The EU has contributed € 8.8 million of the €15 million total cost of the project under the European Commission's research funding programme (Sixth Framework Programme 2001-2006). Until now large volumes of electronic data such as official records, museum archives and scientific results have been unreadable or at risk of loss because newer technologies could not read it or allow current users to understand it. Application of ICT research to benefit Europe's citizens and businesses is a key element of the Digital Agenda for Europe adopted by the Commission in May 2010.

Commission Vice-President for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes said: "Digital information is extremely vulnerable and also extremely valuable. Anyone who has lost access to family photos or old documents will know the frustration of dealing with incompatible technologies. I am very excited by the potential of CASPAR's tools and techniques to ensure sustained quality of and access to valuable data in the future."

## **European Commission holds first contract law roundtable with business and consumer groups**

The European Commission held the first meeting of business, consumer and legal practitioners' groups today to discuss European contract law. At the moment, different national contract laws lead to higher transaction costs for businesses. Companies – particularly small businesses – cannot exploit economies of scale in the EU's Single Market. Consumers suffer because there are fewer goods sold across borders, leading to less choice and higher prices. Progress towards a European contract law could help resolve these problems. The Commission is seeking to build a consensus among key stakeholders on the best way forward on European contract law. It wants to ensure that proposals being drafted by a group of contract law experts ( [IP/10/595](#)) meet the needs of both consumers and businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). On 1 July, the Commission proposed options for a European contract law in a strategic policy paper and opened a public consultation.

## **Biodiversity: Commission seeks views on future options for EU biodiversity policy**

The European Commission has launched a web-based consultation to gather input from a wide range of stakeholders on policy options for the European Union's post-2010 EU biodiversity strategy. Opinions are sought from citizens, stakeholders, public administrations, business and civil society on issues including the shortcomings of the existing biodiversity policy, the new approach that the Commission is proposing, farming and biodiversity, the economics of biodiversity, and biodiversity governance inside and outside the EU. The results will feed into the new strategy which is under development. The consultation runs until 22 October 2010.

European Commissioner for Environment Janez Potočnik said: "Europeans agree on the need to step up efforts to combat biodiversity loss. I encourage everyone concerned by this vital issue to contribute and to help shape our policy on this vital issue."

### **A new focus to combat biodiversity loss**

In March 2010, the Council of the European Union agreed on a post-2010 vision and an ambitious new 2020 target for biodiversity to replace the expiring 2010 target. The new target aims to "halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, restore them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss".

The Council asked the Commission to develop a fully-fledged strategy focused on a limited set of measurable sub-targets for different ecosystems, drivers of biodiversity loss, and response measures.

This survey is intended to canvas opinions about the various policy options available to fine-tune the new strategy, and the steps needed to ensure that it achieves the desired results. The survey asks in particular about areas where current EU legislation is perceived as inadequate or in need of strengthening, and about options for improving the integration of biodiversity policy into other areas.

## **Switzerland contributes €200 million to the economic and social development of Romania and Bulgaria**

The European Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn today welcomed the signature of agreements between Romania and Bulgaria and Switzerland regarding the Swiss

contribution of €200 million (257 million Swiss francs) to economic and social development in these two EU countries over five years. Mr Hahn said "This new contribution demonstrates Switzerland's support for the EU's constant efforts to diminish social and economic disparities within Europe. Strengthening prosperity across the European continent is in all our interests". In the period 2007-2013, the EU's budget for regional policy amounts to €347 billion Euro, 51% of which goes to the 12 countries which joined since 2004. Romania and Bulgaria are entitled to receive €19.7 billion and €6.9 billion respectively. The Swiss allocation for Romania and Bulgaria comes in addition to the €770 million (1 billion Swiss francs) assistance agreed by Switzerland in 2007 for the other ten Member States which joined the EU in 2004. Switzerland's contributions to EU cohesion are intended to reflect the advantages it enjoys under its numerous agreements with the EU.

#### **OTHER INFORMATION**

- [Letter by President Barroso to the Members of the European Parliament](#)
- [State of the Union 2010 by President Barroso to the EP plenary Session, Strasbourg](#)

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**Source: European Commission** - News from the Communication Directorate General's midday briefing