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Joint declaration of the CPU, the HRK and the KRASP

"Education cannot be reduced to skills: keep the term education in the upcoming commissioner's portfolio"

The French, German and Polish Rectors Conferences¹ would like to comment on the probable layout of the incoming European Commission, in particular with regard to the Commissioner in charge of higher education. Being fully aware that the plans at this stage are still provisional, we nevertheless would like to voice our deep concern about the intention to call the new portfolio "Commissioner for Skills, Youth and Multilingualism".

We are strongly convinced that it would send a wrong and misleading signal to replace the term "education" by "skills". Education, and particularly higher education, cannot be reduced to skills. The role of universities is crucial for the future well-being of Europe. Higher education, together with research, contributes to growth, employment and innovation. Education and higher education shape critical thinking and social behaviour and contribute to cultural awareness and European citizenship. Education and higher education have a crucial role to play in helping Europe to overcome the present crises.

But for higher education to fulfill these tasks it is necessary to understand it in the classical European tradition of imparting knowledge AND stimulating the development of critical minds. Skills are important, but they represent only one aspect of education and higher education.

It is our firm conviction that the future Commissioner's portfolio (and the related Directorate General) should continue to keep the term "education" as part of their denomination. For the same reasons we regret the disappearance of the university unit in DG Research and Innovation for the benefit of the skills unit.

In line with the press statement of the European University Association (EUA)² we appeal therefore to the EU institutions to reconsider their proposal and ensure that education is specifically mentioned in the portfolio of the next college of Commissioners.

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¹ CPU, HRK and KRASP

² EUA Press Statement 7 September 2014, <http://www.eua.be/press/press-releases.aspx>