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SPEECH OF JAN FIGEL

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**AT THE OCCASION OF THE SESSION OF THE 21st CENTURY
TALKS ON THE THEME**

“Lifelong learning for all: how long to get there?”

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Monsieur le Directeur général

Monsieur le Sous-Directeur général

Vos excellences,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Bonsoir à tous,

I am very happy to be here because my mandate and UNESCO's share so many identical pillars or points on agenda. This agenda contributes to the changing reality of the European Union because it started around coal and steel, agriculture and economy custom unions and it is now more and more seen and we need to see this community of people, community of values, community of cultures.

I am very happy to be here in this forum and I am sure that it is important. We need global forums not only on finance, not only on environment or security, demography but also and specially on education, access and quality of education.

First of all I believe that education unites. It is true locally, it is true globally. Even this forum, this organization was established in the aftermath of 1945 and world war two which was so tragic. I think we learned something.

The second message I had to say at the beginning is that united we should learn, united we should learn further. If we stay united and learning together we may achieve the 21st Century a different one, more human and closer to the ideals of leaving together in peace, not only existing together and rather in conflicting world. And I think the character of the 21st Century or the character of any time depends on the role of education and maturity of educators.

This means that access, quality, relevance, content of education is a decisive factor for living together united around basic human values as Madam Professor Odora-Hoppers just spoke about.

Even the 20th Century lesson speaks about the oppression or totalitarian regimes in relation to education, to academic freedoms, intellectual potential of the countries. It means where freedom and vitality of education systems is respected and growing or universities are autonomous, this is also a great signal and factor of the autonomy or freedom and vitality of society as a whole.

I would like to contribute a few points from the European perspective to the debate which is already goes on.

I think Europe is committed to education. We could do more. But there is a momentum now. We feel that the Europe of knowledge is an emerging ambition. The Lisbon agenda speaks of a knowledge based society. I think that this is a right and timely ambition it means or it may be successful only when knowledge is in the middle in the centre of any strategy.

Knowledge represents a pyramid with the basic parameters of access, access for all, all of us and lifelong learning for all. This is the title of the conference. The height of the pyramid means quality and relevance of knowledge. We need both, access for all and quality, which means learning what is important today and tomorrow.

This brings a lot of questions and issues around. For example, how to predict what we need to know, for tomorrow or the day after? It is not so easy. Time is changing very rapidly. And we try. This year, for the first time in our cooperation history, we are, for example, trying to predict futures skills, needs in the horizon of 2020. It never happened before and I am sure this is an important contribution.

We will soon come with an initiative called new skills for new jobs. And we need skills for new jobs. Even the strategy of the Union on growth and jobs speaks about more and better jobs. How can we achieve more and better jobs if not through more and better education, or relevant skills?

Change will continue to speed by. Everything is changing fast or faster than before. We expect significant numbers of high skill jobs to be created in Europe all the next decade and a fall in low skilled ones. As a routine, jobs will die away and creative tasks grow. People with only basic skills will struggle to find satisfactory jobs.

Policy needs to imagine the future. But to prepare for it today, the future always starts now, today, not tomorrow. That is why the post 2010 updated framework that we are now debating on European cooperation will set four strategic objectives.

- Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality not the exception, but rather a rule;
- Improve the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes of education;
- Promote equity and active citizenship, education and citizenship;
- And a major new challenge: enhance innovation and creativity throughout education and training; we have already decided to name, to label next year, 2009, the European year of creativity and innovation.

So a lot is done but even more in a way remains to do. For example in Europe today, 6 million young people, 1 in 7 in the age bracket 18-24, leave school early, too early, with only basic qualifications at best. 1 in 5 of our 15 year-olds struggles with reading, a basic competence, and the figures are getting worse, not better. You know the PISA statistics I am sure. Fewer than 60% of Europeans of student-age attend third-level education; if you compare this with Americans or Koreans, it is really significantly less. The emerging economies are catching up fast – China already produces twice as many mathematics, science and technology graduates as Europe.

One of the answers is to improve continuing learning. And lifelong learning strategy comes to the fore. I want to say, first, that it is never too early to learn, and, secondly, that it is never too late to learn

So it starts with pre-school education and continues after formal education

We must tackle early school leaving, for many reasons. All these millions I mentioned have difficulties in further life because of lack of qualifications. But even in the whole of society, we can say, if all early school-leavers completed upper-secondary education, we estimate that total productivity would increase by 1.4%. It's a lot in European terms. We must tackle failures in the first years at university level.

We should look into the broader role of education, which education should play. It is about employability and employment, but also about social inclusion, cultural awareness, cultural expression, living in diverse societies and in times of globalization.

Universities must of course continue providing higher education to young people. But they must also open their doors for non-traditional learners like adults. Higher education has a unique role in creating and imparting knowledge. And it has to become a solid link in the lifelong learning chain.

For many people, learning starts after the school-gate. To quote Winston Churchill, another high achiever, "I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught."

In the European Union we came to a sort of triple agreement on the importance of lifelong learning. We have a programme called Lifelong learning with 7 billions Euros for 7 years in order to promote conditions and frameworks or networks of lifelong learning cooperation, like the famous Erasmus, but also Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig. We have agreed to implement, to adopt and implement a lifelong learning strategy in all countries by 2006.

And we have also established a common benchmark for participation of adults in lifelong learning which is now on the level of roughly 10% of the population, not satisfactory but gradually growing. Lifelong learning is understood as a necessity, not a luxury for some.

Remember that it started in the nineties. I think that 1996 was the European year of lifelong learning and now people talk about civic rights and citizen rights to lifelong learning. It's an achievement!

It is the same when we listen to messages from other countries or for example especially from ACP countries where just a portion of kids have elementary education and millions and millions of adults are illiterate. It is a big gap and we need to narrow this gap towards the Millennium development goals more efficiently, more prudently.

Recently we established in April this year – it is published and it is valid now – the so-called European Qualifications Framework. I mention it because it is a framework for lifelong learning, which puts together the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, one on higher education, and one on vocational education and training.

It's based on output or outcome of learning. So it doesn't measure where one studied or how long but what he or she knows, competences, skills, knowledge acquired. And it's the first ever international qualifications framework. It values qualifications more. It can help in global international domain to value knowledge more than before. And it also comprises or gives place to non-formal and informal education. We have to come on this, even in this conference, this forum, which is about learning and it's the way of learning together.

Lifelong learning strategies have a very important inclusive dimension in societies. As I said, education unites. So the access to education is very important, especially for migrants and migrant children. We see that the gap in many countries is significant, and in the second generation it can be even bigger than in the first generation. Less migrant kids go to tertiary education. They are more vulnerable.

So I think these tendencies should be tackled seriously. In some countries there is visible segregation in schools in this area of living together.

Ethnic and socio-economic segregation in schools is on the rise – the social divide may deepen over time, which deeply conflicts with our European values and aspirations.

So we published in July a Green paper on education and migration in order to help social inclusion. I hope that we will come with some good conclusions after December when the consultation period ends.

Last but not least, or even the most important in this process: the role of teachers. Teachers are key players. They cannot be the objects of any modernization, of any reforms, they should be subjects. If the teacher is a lifelong learner, he is the best example for kids. Education is about opening minds, not filling in minds, and the educator is the first who opens, if ever he opens, the minds of children. So it is about quality of training or initial and in service training for pedagogues. It is about status and attractiveness of teachers.

When I spoke of skills, we need of course basic, traditional skills. But we need also more and more a 'skills mix': for example 'learning to learn' aptitudes – such as creativity, problem-solving, analytical and entrepreneurial skills.

There is also a growing third dimension of skills – the skills that people need for living with growing diversity. Mobility and migration, as I said, are part of our world. We will have some strategies after this year. In Europe, this year is called the European year of intercultural Dialogue.

One of the recommendations is more intercultural education, more intercultural skills. And I'm sure that this will grow in a tendency to give children more social civic communication and language skills.

I want to conclude by saying that one of the best answers in European terms is partnership and mobility. After this conference, I am going to Spain for a forum between enterprises and universities. We believe that partnership of autonomous institutions sharing responsibility and sharing also interests will bring better results. For example vocational education and training and business are good all allies, but even friends or allies need to talk.

We also need an open and flexible dialogue in our education. So that is why we established this year this forum on mobility. Mobility should become rather rule, standard, not exception for some.

Erasmus is the most quoted programme in Europe today. We have a new generation of those who studied abroad, 2 million people, students and teachers. Now we have Erasmus Mundus for non EU students and scholars to come to the European Union. This is a great contribution to the Bologna process and the internationalization of our studies but also for intercultural education.

The forum which we established this year for high level experts will propose to the French presidency specific recommendations in the sense that mobility should grow in number and quality. I believe that we will have strong commitments in November taken by the 27 Member States to support programmes not only on the European level, but also on national and regional levels, and also by business and civil society, to increase quantity and quality of mobility.

As for a programme like Erasmus Mundus, we agreed, last week, that the second phase will double the budget to 960 million for the next five years and Tempus programme will organise a family of teachers, schools and networks and it will help to promote, for example, the value of knowledge, recognition of qualifications, quality and excellence. This concerns all of us.

Ladies and Gentleman,

All that I have said, along with the previous speakers, helps to make Europe and the world people-friendly. I think a people-friendly Europe and world is knowledge a friendly Europe and world.

The message is to act today to prepare tomorrow. I think of Goethe who said “What is not finished today is never finished tomorrow” and of the Chinese proverb that says: “the best time to plant trees is twenty years ago, the second best is today”, because it is about generational change, it is about long term fruits but very sure and very important fruits.

I think that the best criterion and factor of success individual and collective in our endeavours is openness. Openness combines open mindedness and openheartedness. Aristotle said “Educating the minds without educating the hearts is no education at all”. Your very nice quote by Edgar Morin at the end of the brochure has a similar content. Jan Amos Comenius also said “School should be the workshop of humanity” or the manufacture of humanity. So if we stay open, open minded and openhearted, with empathy, sympathy, solidarity to each other, to the nations in our world, education will help us find good and functioning answers to live together and not only to exist together.

Thank you.