

Dear representatives of the academic community, dear Ms Christophidou, dear participants,

The COVID pandemic has shown us **how vulnerable our societies are** and, at the same time, **how resilient they are**.

It has shown us that nothing can be taken for granted:

- not the way we do our **work**,
- not the existence of our **businesses and industries**,
- not our relationships with **friends and family**
- nor the **medical attention** we expect in life-threatening situations.

On the other hand we have seen how amazingly our systems adapted to the crisis.<sup>(1)</sup>

A huge part of **education** moved online and we praise our educators, students and parents for that. Still, we should do even more to help those who were left behind in the first COVID wave.

I hope that today's event will shed some light on **how the education systems can be made future-proof**.

European institutions have an important role to play in this context. In October the EP has adopted a **Resolution on the future of European education in the context of COVID-19**.

We welcomed the European Commission's **Education package** but we emphasized that it was only the first step in the right direction.

The implementation of the **European Education Area** and the new **Digital Education Action Plan** now have to be supported with concrete measures and financing.

In July European leaders agreed on a package of the **next MFF budget** and the **New Generation EU (NGEU) recovery instrument** in the amount of **1824 billion EUR**.

In the MFF only **21,1 billion EUR** was earmarked for EU education, youth, mobility and sports programme Erasmus+. There was **nothing for the education and youth** in the NGEU recovery instrument.

I am proud to say that the negotiation tactics of the **European Parliament's MFF team** as well as my own tactics **in the Erasmus+ negotiations** brought us additional **2,2 billion EUR** last week.

Education and training are extremely important for Europe's **recovery from the COVID pandemic**.

If we want to decrease the prospect of **long-term unemployment** for many Europeans, it will be essential to think **beyond short-term safety nets**, and put more long-term emphasis on the **lifelong learning** and **reskilling of the workforces**.

The COVID crisis has also brought useful lessons: it confirmed the need for **interdisciplinary** learning and the **person-centred** approach to teaching and learning.

The pandemic has shown a **window of opportunity to build back our societies in a better way** – but to do so will require ambition, vision and a willingness to move on from the old order.

This also applies in **education systems** and specially in **universities**.

Unfortunately, most European universities lag behind its **American and Asian competitors**. The **Bologna process** tried to shake them up, but there is still a lot of resistance to change. The charm of the **old Humboldt model of university** is too strong.

I hope that the **new "European Universities" initiative**, which will, most likely, be part of the new Erasmus+ programme, will facilitate welcoming the necessary change.

Europe will benefit from its universities if we can **support the existing excellence** and expand it to those universities **that resist the much needed change**.