



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT AND YOUTH**

**Speech by the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth Dr Athena Michaelidou
at the International Conference
People, Skills and Partnerships: Delivering Vocational Education and Training
Reforms in the Mediterranean
25 June 2026, Nicosia, 9:30- 9:45 a.m.
Philoxenia Conference Center, Jean Monnet Hall**

Honorable deputy ministers,

Dear Director of the European Training Foundation,

Dear representatives of the European Commission, the European Training Foundation
and other international organisations,

Dear delegates and distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union approaches its conclusion, this conference offers an important opportunity not only to reflect on the progress achieved over the past months, but also to look ahead and consider how we can continue working together to strengthen education, skills and cooperation across Europe and the Mediterranean.

Throughout our Presidency, we have sought to advance discussions on key priorities in education and training, including the future of Erasmus+, support for teachers through professional development and empowerment, and the promotion of a learner-centred approach aligned with the European Education Area and the Union of Skills. What brings these priorities together is our determination to ensure that every learner is equipped with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to fully participate in society and thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

These priorities reflect the guiding motto of the Cyprus Presidency: “An autonomous Union. Open to the world”. For Cyprus, strategic autonomy is built not only through economic strength and technological capacity, but also through investment in people,

education and skills. At the same time, autonomy should never be confused with isolation. Europe's strength lies in its openness, its partnerships and its ability to engage constructively with its neighbours and partners around the world.

Situated at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Cyprus has placed particular emphasis on strengthening cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood and the wider Mediterranean region. In many ways, this conference reflects that very ambition.

Vocational Education and Training has a particularly important role to play in this context and is central to our efforts to prepare learners for the future. VET is a key driver of skills development, employability, innovation and social inclusion. Our efforts focus on strengthening the link between education and labour market needs, promoting excellence, supporting mobility and ensuring that VET systems respond effectively to the challenges of the twin transition.

More specifically, during the last 3 years, we invest in VET through practical measures: we promote quality programmes, variety, based on data. We offer the technological gymnasium where we promote technical and vocational skills from the age of 12. We have doubled the demand for VET education.

Many of these priorities are reflected in the discussions taking place during this conference. The focus on youth and women's empowerment, skills ecosystems, vocational excellence and skills reforms for the twin transition highlights the importance of cooperation, innovation and shared learning in building more inclusive, resilient and future-oriented societies.

As the Cyprus Presidency draws to a close, we hope that the partnerships strengthened through this conference, and the ideas generated through our discussions, will contribute to a lasting legacy of cooperation between Europe and the Mediterranean region. The future of our societies will depend not only on the skills we develop, but also on our collective ability to work together in shaping a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all.