



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT AND YOUTH
Welcome Speech by the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth
Dr Athena Michaelidou

High Level Group Meeting on Education and Training, Nicosia
1 December 2025, 9:00 a.m., New Nicosia Town Hall

Dear Mayor of Nicosia, Mr Charalambos Prountzos

Dear delegates,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Nicosia, the capital of the Republic of Cyprus, for this High Level Group Meeting on Education and Training. I extend warm greetings and appreciation for your presence here. This Meeting is the very first event of the incoming Cyprus Presidency in the field of Education and Training and it therefore carries particular weight and meaning for us. It opens the cycle of educational activities that Cyprus will lead throughout its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2026. This beginning brings with it both a deep sense of responsibility and a profound feeling of excitement.

Allow me to express my deep gratitude to the Municipality of Nicosia and to Mayor Charalambos Prountzos for hosting us in the New Nicosia Town Hall. Situated in the heart of the historic walled city, this landmark offers not only a venue, but a fitting symbol of continuity, innovation and civic engagement. We also extend our thanks to the Danish Presidency for its dedicated leadership over the past months. Cyprus looks forward to building upon the work accomplished, in dialogue and partnership with all Member States, in an effort to help Europe advance its ambitious agenda in education and training.

Over the next two days, we will examine themes that are pivotal to Europe's long-term educational direction, extracting lessons from recent progress and determining the next steps that will define the years ahead at national and European levels in Digital Skills in Education and Training. The parallel workshops will allow us to deepen reflection through focused discussions on citizenship education, lifelong learning and mobility and the teaching profession in the new era. These issues are central to the vision of the European Education Area. Tomorrow, we will reflect on how we can shape the future of the European Education Area. Together, these discussions will help us plan a coherent and ambitious way forward, ensuring that our collective efforts continue to strengthen education systems across Europe.

As we assume the responsibilities of the upcoming Presidency, Cyprus will pursue a balanced and forward-looking agenda. Our priorities will include the advancement of negotiations on the Erasmus+ Regulation, with emphasis on accessibility and inclusion; a decisive focus on strengthening the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession, particularly in the era of Artificial Intelligence; the promotion of a modern and dynamic vocational education and training sector aligned with emerging labour market needs; and a renewed commitment to cooperation in higher education mobility. These priorities carry a clear strategic purpose: to reinforce education as a cornerstone of a resilient, cohesive, competitive and innovative Europe. Our aim is to ensure that our systems remain inclusive, innovative, resilient, innovative and capable of meeting the evolving needs of all learners, especially those most in need.

The policies we pursue should not remain rhetorical. They should transform into concrete actions for the benefit of learners all over Europe. New generations face unprecedented challenges: technological acceleration, climate disruption, social fragmentation and complex geopolitical realities. It is our collective duty to ensure they receive not only high-quality education, but also values, direction, confidence and hope. This responsibility rests on every stakeholder in the educational ecosystem: governments, institutions, teachers and trainers, researchers and communities alike.

This responsibility feels especially present in Nicosia. Our city remains the last divided capital of Europe. Its division stands as a daily reminder of the fragility of peace and the obligation of dialogue. Yet this same city is a living testament to resilience, creativity and human capability. It embodies the belief that transformation is always within reach.

Dear friends,

I wish you an inspiring and productive meeting. May your discussions be frank, ambitious, inspiring and collaborative. And may your time in Nicosia allow you to discover not only our history and hospitality, but the spirit of a capital that looks to the future with determination.

Thank you and once again, welcome to Nicosia, welcome to Cyprus!

The welcome speech was delivered, on behalf of the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth, by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Mr George Panteli.