



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



**Welcome Speech by the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth, Dr Athena Michaelidou,
at the Meeting of Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training**

30 March 2026, Brussels

Dear Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training,

Dear representatives of the European Commission and of European Agencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome you to this meeting of the Directors-General for Vocational Education and Training, held in the framework of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

We meet at a time when the European Union is undergoing profound economic, social and technological transformations. The green and digital transitions, demographic shifts, geopolitical developments and rapidly evolving labour market needs make skills development a strategic priority for Europe's future.

In this context, VET plays a central role in building a resilient and competitive European skills ecosystem. It contributes significantly to social cohesion, sustainable growth and the creation of quality employment opportunities.

The Cyprus Presidency places particular emphasis on advancing the strategic dialogue on the future of VET in Europe, especially in relation to the next steps to be taken by the Member States along with the European Commission in this field. This is closely linked to the implementation of the European Skills Agenda and the continued development of the European Education Area.

A key priority for our Presidency is to promote policies that strengthen skills, enhance the link between education and the labour market, and foster innovation. Our aim is to contribute to

shaping a robust European framework that supports sustainable development, social cohesion and competitiveness.

Strengthening the attractiveness of VET is also a key priority of the Cyprus Presidency. VET must be recognised on an equal footing with other educational pathways and offer real prospects for professional development, innovation and entrepreneurship. In this regard, reinforcing apprenticeships and strengthening links with the labour market are critical.

At the same time, quality and excellence must remain at the core of VET systems. This requires strong quality assurance mechanisms, continuous professional development for trainers, and the adoption of modern pedagogical approaches.

Innovation is equally important. VET should act as a dynamic hub for cooperation among education providers, businesses, social partners and research institutions. The development of centres of vocational excellence, stronger synergies with industry, and more flexible learning pathways can significantly enhance responsiveness to economic needs.

In addition, we must continue to promote the international dimension of VET. Mobility, transnational partnerships and the exchange of good practices strengthen the European dimension and enhance global competitiveness.

Furthermore, the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence presents both challenges and opportunities. It is transforming professions, creating new specializations and reshaping the organisation of work while it can become a valuable tool for the educational process, enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and contributing to the improvement of governance in education systems. In this context, the use of Artificial Intelligence in VET is also among our priorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting offers a valuable opportunity for meaningful dialogue on the future of VET in Europe. Through the exchange of ideas and experiences, we can help shape policies that strengthen skills, support competitiveness and ensure a fair and sustainable transition for all.

The Cyprus Presidency remains fully committed to promoting dialogue and cooperation in the field of skills and VET, contributing to a strong, resilient and competitive European skills landscape.

I thank you for your presence and contribution and I wish you a successful and productive meeting.

Dr Athena Michaelidou
Minister of Education, Sport and Youth