

Welcome speech by H.E. J.ZAJÍČEK, Ambassador, for the conference „JOIN US – SUPPORT ME“

Themes:

- welcome
- role and main activities of the Perm Rep, cooperation with the Council, with EP, Commission and other EU bodies, Erasmus+ programme
- tasks of the project Join us, general problematic of inclusion in education
- final years of this Commission and EP, main tasks ahead, SoU speech, big topics and every day agenda
- closing remarks

Dear madam commissioner, dear guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear students,

It is my true pleasure to welcome you at the Czech Permanent Representation during your visit to Brussels and to contribute to the project “Join us, support me” at least by providing these premises for sharing your views with today’s distinguished speakers and guests.

To start with I would like to explain to you what is Permanent Representation, what is its role and how it functions, what are our main tasks and activities and how this institution falls in place with other EU bodies. You come from several countries of the EU and every member state of the EU has its Permanent Representation in Brussels along-side its bilateral embassy. The main task of these institutions is to deal with different EU agendas from the perspective of the given Member State. Just to make this more understandable let me give you some examples. Based on the long-term EU policies and the Commission’s work plan the European Commission prepares policy documents which are then negotiated in the Council of the EU and the European Parliament as the two co-legislator bodies and opinions to selected policy documents may be also delivered by the European Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. According to your programme you will have the opportunity to visit all these bodies so you will get a clearer picture by the end of your visit to Brussels.

The Permanent Representation comprises of experts from different national ministries who deal with the agendas of their portfolio and negotiate the documents delivered by the European Commission within respective working groups of the Council. It can be the agenda of education, transport, health, environment, energy, budget, etc. These negotiations are chaired by the Presidency, which is a member state that in the given period of half a year holds the Presidency of the EU. Since July 1, till end of December it is Estonia that holds the Presidency and chairs all the working groups, Coreper and Council meetings. The order of the presidencies is fixed and in this order also the representatives of the member states sit around the table in the Council meetings during the negotiations. The Presidency has its half year programme, priority topics in all EU agendas, logo and besides chairing

the working groups, Councils and other meetings held here in Brussels or Luxembourg, organizes events, conferences and meetings in its country.

To be more concrete on how EU works, I can use the example of the project “Join us - support me” thanks to which you are now visiting Brussels. This project is financed by one of the most known EU programmes – Erasmus+, which this year celebrates 30th anniversary of its existence. It is a programme to support education and training, mobility of students and teachers, youth work, sports activities, etc. The structure of the Erasmus+ programme is given by a legal act proposed by the Commission and in detail negotiated by the Education Committee, where each Member State has one representative, and by the European Parliament in the committee responsible for education and culture. These negotiations take approximately two years and after the negotiations are successfully concluded, the programme is adopted by the Council and EP and starts being implemented. The current one is set for the period of 7 years (2014 – 2020) with an allocated budget of 14,7 bil. EUR.

Each year a programme committee which comprises of national experts decides on concrete priorities, projects and budget for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme for the next year. As inclusion is one of the big priority topics of the European Commission and Member States a call for proposal was launched for this topic and the project “Join us” was approved for funding for the years 2015 - 2018. This project uses two subjects – sports and music to help children with special needs integrate into regular classes, allows them to show their strengths and talents. It was surely not by coincidence that these two subjects were selected in an international project, as both sports and music can be practiced and understood across nations, languages and cultures. Children with special needs also quite often excel in these subjects and therefore it gives them notion of self-confidence and respect among peers which definitely helps their inclusion into regular classes.

The EU is slowly approaching the end of the term of the current Commission and EP, in 2019 there will be elections for the next term of the EP and a new Commission will be set up. Last week the Presidents of the European Commission, Mr. Juncker, gave the State of the Union speech in Strassbourg, where the priorities for the upcoming time frame were set. The EU has to deal with big issues such as Brexit, migration policy, control of external borders, security and fight against terrorism, energy or social issues, digital single market, and many others. Soon the Commission will propose new Multiannual Financial Framework and new EU programmes for the timeframe after 2020. These programmes will set out future priorities of the EU, future responses to the challenges that we all in Europe face. Be assured that all of you will be somehow influenced by these programmes and activities. You will experience it probably most of all through the education and youth policies, but even other policy areas will affect your everyday life.

For myself I would like to thank you for coming to Brussels, for your interest in the EU policies, in how the EU functions, how and where are the decisions for our common future made. Maybe in few years you will yourselves be part of your country’s Permanent Representations and influence our future. Enjoy your stay in Brussels, don’t be shy to ask questions not only here today, but in all the places you will visit during your stay and fully use the opportunity which you were given by this project. Have fun and learn by doing!

Thank you for your attention