I would like to thank to the organisers for the invitation and the opportunity to share the EU perspective at this very important event. In my today's contribution, I would like to outline the elements of the European VET 2020 strategy to improve the attractiveness of vocational education and training.

First of all, I would like to mention briefly what difficulties we face in our VET systems. We are facing an image problem, when VET is considered “a second chance learning option” in majority of European countries. The best achievers in compulsory schooling are systematically directed to general education with a view to continue later on at a university. This aspect, on its own, is not a problem and we can only support a trend to higher qualification levels. But, the problem is that countries who put heavy emphasis on general education and high rates of tertiary graduates in academic streams nowadays face significant labour market mismatches. In fact, according to different labour market surveys, the most demanded professions on the labour market are skilled workers and traditional craft trades such as carpenters, welders and plumbers.

I think that these problems are generally known amongst our stakeholders. What is then needed to overcome and solve these issues? I think that the most important thing is the change in a perception of vocational education and training. And I know that it is feasible, as experience from some European countries with very high quality systems have shown. We need to work on several levels at the same time. Through targeted activities, we should address individuals, meaning young people and parents when they decide about their careers. Often, the preference to general education can be anchored at the compulsory education level, where schools and their guidance counsellors might have the tendency to favour an academic track. And of course, policy makers need to be aware of the value and contribution of VET to the economic and societal development and give VET the necessary political support.

We need to keep in our mind the focus on individuals. We need to show to young people that VET can be a rewarding career with good pay and job prospects. As the evidence suggests, vocational graduates, particularly from work-based systems have easy transitions to labour market.

In a way, in concentrated efforts we need to demonstrate the excellence and value of VET in broader economic and societal context. I am convinced that EuroSkills is a very good instrument to highlight the excellence and value of vocational education and training.

Just two days ago, the EU ministers in charge of VET have endorsed a strategy for VET up to 2020 and defined the main objectives of the EU cooperation in this field. They have also formulated the following vision of VET in 2020:

> "By 2020, European VET systems should be more attractive, relevant, career-oriented, innovative, accessible and flexible than in 2010, and should contribute to excellence and equity in lifelong learning."

I believe that the aspect of attractiveness is rightly placed in the first place. However, the attractiveness is in fact a final product and result of different efforts to improve vocational education and training. In other words, we need to work on all aspects related to VET in order to increase its attractiveness.

As the time is short, I will mention just a couple of concrete proposals:

We should introduce different activities which should raise the image of VET. I am very glad, that skills competitions have a prominent place in the new EU VET strategy and are explicitly mentioned as a tool to promote VET attractiveness and excellence. Similarly, we should introduce concrete attractiveness campaigns that should be focused on removing the « VET stereotypes ». In relation to career choices, young people in the phase of their compulsory schools should have the possibility to experience and « try-out » different vocational professions. They should also have an access to appropriate guidance service. Once decided for a vocational pathway, VET should enable access to up-to-date technical equipment. This is to be achieved only in close cooperation with businesses and I am happy to see an example of such a partnership here at EuroSkills 2010. We will also launch a specific survey of attitudes and perception about VET in the next year.

Working only on a « promotion » side is not enough. We need to base the image shift on a high quality system. Therefore, we need to implement quality assurance standards and work mainly on relevance of VET to labour market needs. This can be best done through promotion of work-based training, apprenticeship schemes and partnerships with social partners to make the training provision fully in line with requirements of employers. We need to also get some feedback on how VET graduates manage the transitions to labour market and whether they find a job which is relevant to their training. Last but not least, we need to enhance the quality of teachers, trainers and other VET professionals, as they are the key to high quality training.

There are a number of other initiatives planned to be undertaken by Member States and European Commission, but I would stop here and I look forward to the discussion.

I would like to invite you to consult the Bruges Communiqué on our website. Thank you for your attention!