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Creating jobs in the 21st century

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Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon.

During a recent meeting of a committee responsible for the content of schoolbooks, a participating professor predicted that in the future “Career Orientation”, is the one book that will not cease to go through changes.

This viewpoint, in my opinion, calls attention to the critical significance of designing a far-reaching and realistic strategy for employment and growth.

It is well-known after all that in the past few years there has been a lively and wide-ranging debate about the effectiveness of applied policies both on the national and international levels.

Prior to discussing my thoughts about the growth strategy that proliferates employment opportunities and addresses unemployment by making structural changes, please allow me to make two observations that I believe are significant:

The first is that the nature and quality of a job along with the possibility of finding one, are directly connected to the fulfillment and happiness of people and by extension to their quality of life.

The second observation is that the key success factor of an international or domestic policy over time is its ability to foresee developments and to offer the necessary conditions that will educate social partners and will help them adjust to the requirements of a new era.

Within this context, it would be useful to make a brief and I hope consequential reference to the international economic environment.

In 2005, world economy managed to maintain its dynamics, confirming evaluations that it has taken a course of steady growth, leaving behind for good a period marked by the marginal growth rates of primarily the developed economies and the rise of unemployment.

It seems that the economy will stay on that course for the rest of this year, despite the constant increase of oil prices and interest rates, and despite the rise in geopolitical risks that threaten to reverse it at any given time, posing a lot of questions and causing concerns to governments, public institutions and financial analysts.

This positive development results mainly from the prevalence of a growth model –at least in the developed countries- that is based on the following three: Openness - Entrepreneurship – Competitiveness.

But how is the specific model connected to job policies and the development of new professions?

With two “magical” words: Speed and Flexibility.

Leading experts of the OECD as well as other international organizations, acknowledge the fact that traditional types of work, especially in the developed world, have been changing at such a pace that in the next 20 years, half of the professions as we have known them so far, will disappear.

The same will happen in corporations. Many positions will cease to exist and others will change.

At the beginning of the 20th century an industrial company employed 12% university graduates and 35% high school graduates. Today 80% of the people employed have higher technical and university education.

The changes in the structure of developed economies are significant too.

In the Europe of 25, the services sector – trade, banking, IT, tourism, insurance etc. represents on average 65% of the financial activity, the secondary sector 24% and the primary 8%.

The conclusion? The change in the structure and nature of financial activity automatically results in changes to both the job market and career orientation.

These changes have run their course today and have been accelerated by the unprecedented development of new technologies, which eliminate activities while at the same time generate new ones.

This new reality poses two questions:

What are the “good” professions of today and tomorrow and how long are they going to last?

Well, “good” professions will be based on the factor of knowledge and will refer mainly to the IT and telecommunication sectors.

On the other hand, because changes in the nature and structure of work will come about faster than in the past, some individuals will have to be able to change professions two or even three times in their lives, and of course they will need education continuously.

If we take into consideration that, according to a study on employment, the knowledge available to people today represents only 5% of the knowledge that will be available in 2020, it's easy to understand that nothing can be permanent in the professional world anymore.

Let's look now at the trends in the development of professions.

Are traditional professions at risk?

How is the new map of professions shaping up in the different sectors of economy?

In the primary sector the applications of biotechnology will prevail and therefore biotechnologists will be in demand replacing current agriculturists, who will have to go back to school. Furthermore, genetics will play a decisive role in poultry farming. As a result, relevant work positions will be created.

Besides, genetics apply to many other fields, especially medicine and to any other discipline that studies the health of living organisms.

Generally speaking, except for the application of new technologies, the percentage of employment in agriculture will not be very high. However, there will be a call for experts in organic farming, a field which is already growing fast.

In industry, the proliferation of new products and the rapid decrease of their average life span, are already creating new positions for marketing and sales professionals. These sectors develop unique dynamics and offer competitive remuneration.

The same goes for those who specialize in the latest production methods, such as laser technicians, robotics designers and engineers, who can use artificial intelligence – which is the capability of computers and robots to perform difficult tasks that demand human intelligence to be completed.

Today, however, there are computers that are able to perform these tasks with great speed, if a man “teaches” them how to follow commands.

Therefore, the role of Internet will become more and more decisive which will by itself bring new revolutionary changes in work and its nature.

Moreover, trading practices will continue to be superseded by e-commerce, a phenomenon that is already evident.

Specialized data managers, psychologists and people with degrees in all areas of communications studies, financial services, the organization of IT departments, Internet and digital applications, will all have good career perspectives.

A great future is open to those who will specialize in the protection of the environment. The industry will get more and more “green” and, in general, the environmental sciences will offer great career opportunities. In the years to come, we will hear a lot about reengineering in industry, namely the techniques of restructuring and reforming its organizational and operational structure. In this framework, the daring management executives will certainly not be in danger of losing their job.

Furthermore, there will be a rising demand for those specialized in human resources management, to the extent that people acquire more significance. Similarly promising are

the prospects for internal and external communication experts that specialize in crisis management, as crises will arise more frequently in companies.

In the age of globalization, the future is full of promise for those who decide to enter foreign markets and to help open up corporations to the world. Knowledge of two or three foreign languages will be a necessary qualification.

At this point, one should not fail to note that the current and future labor market is not limited to national boundaries.

The labor market is the unified European space, within which employees and professionals can move freely and settle, a fact of great significance for their careers.

Therefore, those already in the labor force –and especially those who are about to enter it– should be willing to broaden their horizons and be ready to leave the national labor market, if it doesn't meet their expectations.

This is a crucial dimension of employment that our youth should be made aware of from their early school years.

In the services sector there will be increased demand for financial and insurance consultants, private investment experts, doctors who use laser instead of a scalpel and legal advisors with an expertise in intricate international issues. These will be the best-paid professionals in the services sector. Highly specialized professionals in the tourist industry, along with experienced consultants in exercise, healthy nutrition, psychology and social work, will follow suit.

Business development in fields of new technology is certain to rank high on the list of career choices. As a result, much more than today, new opportunities for entrepreneurship will arise in the future in areas unknown 15 or 20 years ago.

Hence, in every country, and more so in the developed ones, the two most significant requirements for prosperity are: education and business spirit. For that reason, emphasis should be laid today on the concept of entrepreneurship, which should be taught in all schools to the benefit of young people and the societies they live in.

Education should evolve into a significant economic and cultural process, representing an increasing percentage of the GDP in every country.

At the same time, opportunities for employment should be offered in research institutions, which will be affiliated with academic institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we live in an age of constant change when solid reference points are dwindling away.

For that reason, the policy on job market has to adjust to the new conditions and offer stability and much needed confidence to the public. It has to find new ways to approach people, so that it can address their insecurity and earn, even in the long run, the citizen's trust in a new perspective. It has to restore self-confidence and be a catalyst for change leading to a better quality of life.

Because the future belongs to those who can foresee developments and not to those who struggle to catch up.