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(Information)

## COUNCIL

## CONCLUSIONS BY THE COUNCIL

of 21 February 2005

on Education and Training in the framework of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy

(2005/C 85/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to:

1. The new strategic goal set for the European Union by the Lisbon European Council of 23–24 March 2000 and reaffirmed by the Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001 to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.
2. The substantial contribution of Lifelong Learning, covering all forms of learning and all levels and dimensions of Education and Training, to all these objectives and to the achievement of sustainable development, as acknowledged by the Lisbon European Council itself.
3. The fact that some 33 million people in the European Union are not in active employment; Europe's workforce is ageing, and 32 % of the working age population (78 million) is low skilled. In contrast, over the next five years, only 15 % of newly created jobs will be for people with basic schooling, whereas 50 % of newly created jobs will require highly skilled workers.
4. The progress made, in particular in the context of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme at national and European level.

5. The Commission Communication to the Spring European Council 2005 ('Working together for growth and jobs — A new start for the Lisbon Strategy') and the need to identify areas where the European Council may support further progress.

STRESSES THAT:

6. The knowledge society is key to the Lisbon Strategy. The contribution of education and training is therefore essential, as they provide the indispensable skills base and creative potential.
  - The Lisbon goals of competitiveness and economic growth can only be achieved if young people coming onto the labour market are properly equipped through quality education and training in line with the evolution of society.
  - More efficient investment in education and training leads in general to a significant increase of the national product of a country and contribute to the future income of the learners.
  - Better quality of education and training as well as better access and higher participation not only enable an increasing number of people to achieve personal development but also contribute to sustainable economic growth, social cohesion and more and better jobs.

- Increasing participation and completion rates in initial education and training will have a positive effect on the quality of the labour force, improve people's employability and therefore reduce public spending.
  - The higher education sector is situated at the crossroads of research, education and innovation and is therefore key to the competitiveness of the European Union.
  - No advanced economy can survive without continuous upgrading of people's skills, regardless of their age. Lifelong learning is therefore essential, and needs to be encouraged in all the Member States. It increases the overall skills levels of the workforce, allowing people to adapt to the rapidly changing needs of the labour market and to new technologies and improving the conditions for occupational and geographical mobility. In this regard, basic training in ICT (digital literacy) for all is essential.
7. As regards the issue of sustainable growth and 'more and better jobs', education and training provide the foundation on which better quality jobs can be created and growth sustained. This is even more true in knowledge-based societies and economies.
- More jobs can only result from a better and more job-intensive economic growth; this in turn requires that the labour force have the skills and competences needed by entrepreneurs and companies.
  - Better quality jobs imply a higher level of competence from the worker, which in turn implies greater individual development at all levels of education and training throughout life, in the light of demographic change. Education and training, non-formal and informal learning, are means to achieve this.
  - Education and training raise young people's awareness of the environmental dimension and help them understand that a sustainable economic growth, while addressing the needs of present generations, must not put at risk those of future generations.
8. As regards the question of 'greater social cohesion', education and training promote understanding and tolerance. Moreover, they open a more equitable start in life for all.
- Early education provides the best chance to develop social skills in children, and to prepare them for the increasingly multi-cultural world in which we live
- and, in particular, to give children with fewer opportunities a better preparation for school.
- Citizenship education in its broadest sense, including opportunities for participation in civil society, is a complementary means of combating cultural and social exclusion and facilitating the integration of young people as well as people with special needs in society.
- RECALLS THAT:
9. In accordance with the Lisbon conclusions, the Council has agreed on a coherent and integrated Work Programme, now referred to as 'Education and Training 2010'. The Council and Commission, in their Joint Interim Report to the European Council adopted in February 2004, underlined three priority areas for immediate further action:
- focus reform and investment on the key areas for the knowledge-based society;
  - make lifelong learning a reality;
  - establish a European area of education and training.
10. Agreement has been reached on Europass, as well as on other key issues, such as the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and guidance throughout life. Priority should now be given to implementing these agreements at the national level. The future priorities for reforms and investment in VET are defined in the Council conclusions adopted on 15 November 2004, which formed the basis for the Maastricht Communiqué adopted on 14 December 2004.
11. Under the impulse of the Bologna process, progress has been made in stimulating curricular reform in higher education across Europe. In addition, the Erasmus Mundus programme was adopted in December 2003 to promote the EU as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. However, more action and support from the EU would enable higher education institutions to fulfil their key role in achieving the Lisbon objectives.
12. In order to monitor progress under the Work Programme, the Council has adopted a number of benchmarks for the EU as a whole in May 2003. They are all-important for the Lisbon Strategy and should therefore be achieved by 2010.

13. At national level, the modernisation of education and training systems is underway, but much remains to be done to implement the necessary reforms.

— Identify cost sharing models of continuing training (employers, employees and public service).

— Develop national strategies, aiming *inter alia* at filling the current gap in terms of access to life-long learning opportunities between large and small companies, and between high and low skilled people.

RECOMMENDS THAT:

14. In preparation for the next joint report of the Council and Commission to the European Council in 2006, further action be taken at European and national level, having regard to the Lisbon Mid-Term Review according to the priority levers of 'Education and Training 2010', as they were stated in the 2004 Joint Interim Report, in particular with reference to actions for the development of human capital:

— Adopt the future integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning.

— Establish a European area of Education and Training:

— Strengthen the open method of coordination, for example by:

— Focus reform and investment on the key areas for the knowledge-based society:

— working in 'peer learning' clusters, allowing Member States to focus on their priority areas;

— Realise the Lisbon objective of a substantial increase in, and efficient use of public and private investment in education and training.

— improving the scope, precision and reliability of education and training statistics;

— Develop a culture of excellence as well as evaluation systems to ensure that EU education and training systems become a world quality reference.

— identifying indicators in new fields and making them operational, as envisaged in the Joint Interim Report, including the foreign language competence indicator requested by the Barcelona European Council, in March 2002.

— Improve governance at national level by involving all relevant stakeholders, including the social partners, and by improving coordination among the public authorities concerned.

— Adopt common reference points at European level in fields such as key competences and the training of teachers and trainers.

— Strengthen synergies and complementarity between education and other policy areas such as employment, research and innovation, and macroeconomic policy.

— Strengthen the role of higher education institutions in the Lisbon Strategy and improve the quality of higher education in order to enhance its international attractiveness and the mobility of the students and staff.

— Making lifelong learning a reality:

National strategies for lifelong learning should aim to ensure that all citizens, acquire the key competences they need in a knowledge society and that open, attractive and accessible learning environments are created. The following measures, among others, can contribute to achieving these goals:

— Enhance the synergy and the complementarity between Higher Education and Research to stimulate innovation and employment through the mobility of young researchers and the networking of centres of excellence.

— Multiply opportunities of lifelong learning, for example by means of distance-learning especially through the use of ICT.

— Develop by the end of 2006 a European Qualifications Framework as a common reference covering both VET and general education (secondary and higher), based on competences and learning outcomes.

— Stimulate lifelong learning demand through measures to reconcile work and family life.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL:

15. To reaffirm that lifelong learning is and will remain a *sine qua non* for achieving the Lisbon goals. In this context, the successful implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme is essential in order both to develop knowledge and innovation and to create more and better jobs.
  16. To seize the momentum of the Mid-Term-Review, by giving priority to:
    - the putting in place of coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies in the Member States by 2006 encompassing all levels and dimensions of education and training to develop the skills and competences needed, with the involvement of all stakeholders concerned;
    - the promotion of excellence at all levels of Education and Training systems in support of jobs and growth, as well as social cohesion;
    - the implementation in the Member States of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme, including the necessary increase in and more efficient use of investment in education and training;
  - enhanced European cooperation in education and training in order to stimulate and support reform, particularly through
    - peer learning, made more relevant to Member States' needs;
    - improving the quality of the monitoring of progress;
    - enhancing the contribution of VET, higher Education and Research to the Lisbon strategy.
  17. To call on the Council (Education/Youth/Culture) to contribute to the monitoring of those aspects coming with its competence i.e. education and training, in the framework of the reporting mechanisms of the Lisbon Strategy.
  18. To include the initiative of a European Pact for Youth, in the framework of the Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon strategy, in order to promote a generation of young Europeans with quality jobs, a higher level of education and undergoing training to improve their adaptability and to define orientations for concrete measures for this purpose in the framework of 'Education and Training 2010' and of existing programmes.
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