



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 12.11.1997
COM(97) 563 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

TOWARDS A EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. BUILDING A EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE.....	3
1. A limited number of objectives	4
2. More focused actions	4
3. The players involved.....	6
4. Targeted international cooperation	7
II. MORE INTEGRATED ARRANGEMENTS.....	8
1. Legal instruments	8
2. Complementarity and budgetary resources.....	8
3. Streamlined implementation	9

Introduction

The purpose of this Communication is to set out the guidelines for future Community action in the areas of education, training and youth for the period 2000-2006. It paves the way for the legal instruments to be proposed in the spring of 1998, with the relevant decisions to follow in 1999 and entry into force on 1 January 2000.

It responds to two major preoccupations:

Knowledge policies

- Noting that we are now entering the "knowledge society", the Commission in its **Agenda 2000** proposes making **the policies which drive that society (innovation, research, education and training)** one of the four fundamental pillars of the Union's internal policies. The role of future Community activity in these four areas is to underpin this evolution while ensuring that it does not become a new source of exclusion. Economic competitiveness, employment and the personal fulfilment of the citizens of Europe is no longer mainly based on the production of physical goods, nor will it be in the future. Real wealth creation will henceforth be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge and will depend first and foremost on our efforts in the field of research, education and training and on our capacity to promote innovation. This is why we must fashion a veritable 'Europe of knowledge'.
- This process is directly linked to the aim of developing **lifelong learning** which the Union has set itself and which has been incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty, expressing the determination of the Union *to promote the highest level of knowledge for its people through broad access to education and its permanent updating.*

Promoting employment

- Policies to restore the employment situation – whether macroeconomic policies or specific labour market action – must be able to build on an in-depth medium-term strategy to enhance the knowledge and **skills** of all Europe's citizens.
 - ◊ In its conclusions, the Amsterdam European Council stressed that priority should be given to the development of vocational and social skills to facilitate workers' adaptation to labour-market developments. The emphasis should be on a solid broad-based education and on a set of skills (technological, social and organisational) which are conducive to innovation. In this respect it referred in particular to a range of transversal competencies – including the understanding of a diversity of cultures, competence in several languages, and the entrepreneurship which leads to the creation or development of businesses, especially in SMEs.

- The guidelines for Member States' employment policies which the Commission has just proposed place an accent on the need for a new approach to integration into the world of work. New Community activities in the field of education, training and youth must support the achievement of the aims specified, viz.:
 - ◊ reducing long-term employment and youth unemployment;
 - ◊ reducing both the number of young people who leave compulsory schooling early and those who do not complete upper secondary-level education and training;
 - ◊ strengthening participation rates in apprenticeship systems, by regarding those Member States with the best performances in this respect as reference points where appropriate;
 - ◊ greater recourse to training for the unemployed;
 - ◊ stepping up joint efforts by the business sector and the social partners to offer those who so wish the opportunity to acquire work experience or receive training.

- Community policy in the field of education, training and youth and the new generation of activities supporting it must enable Europe to face these major new challenges.

- Community action in the three fields has developed and gained momentum over the past 15 years. The achievements of Community cooperation to date and the evaluation of the existing programmes (Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth for Europe) and their predecessors (Erasmus, Comett, Lingua, Petra, Force and Eurotchnet) provide solid foundations for the next steps. The new Community activities must capitalise on all these achievements. It is clear that a response must be forthcoming for the strongly-felt demand for the continuation of the existing activities, but it is also clear that proposals must be brought forward for a new generation of activities with:
 - ◊ a limited number of objectives,
 - ◊ more focused actions, and
 - ◊ streamlined management.

In more general terms, everything must be done to build the **Europe of knowledge which we need as we move into the twenty-first century.**

I. BUILDING A EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE

- The gradual construction of an open and dynamic European educational area is the guiding principle on which this Communication is based. In a rapidly-changing world, our societies must offer all citizens greater opportunities for access to knowledge, irrespective of their age or social circumstances. This is why the notion of an educational area needs to be understood in the broadest possible sense, both geographically and temporally. It provides the framework for mobilising the effort to make a reality of the idea of *lifelong learning*, which was at the heart of the European Year devoted to this theme in 1996.
- Three dimensions of the European educational area should be emphasized:

Knowledge

- ◊ In order to be able to take an active part in the current processes of change, the citizens of Europe will be able to develop their fund of knowledge continually, thus expanding and renewing it on a lasting basis.

Citizenship

- ◊ This educational area will facilitate an enhancement of citizenship through the sharing of common values, and the development of a sense of belonging to a common social and cultural area. It must encourage a broader-based understanding of citizenship, founded on active solidarity and on mutual understanding of the cultural diversities that constitute Europe's originality and richness.

Competence

- ◊ Developing employability through the acquisition of competencies made necessary through changes in work and its organisation. This means that it is necessary to promote on a lifelong basis creativity, flexibility, adaptability, the ability to 'learn to learn' and to solve problems. These are the conditions we must meet in order to overcome the now-rapid obsolescence of skills. Activities must be developed which help towards anticipating needs and towards the evolution of job profiles.
- The very scale of these new challenges calls for a greater degree of integration between the fields of education, training and youth policy. While turning the idea of a European educational space into reality will utilise the types of activity which have already been at the heart of earlier action programmes and have assured their success to date, it will also have to make intensive use of the new information and communication technologies, which are still insufficiently used in Europe despite the numerous public and private initiatives taken to remedy this situation such as Netd@ys.

1. A LIMITED NUMBER OF OBJECTIVES

The new generation of actions must focus upon a limited number of objectives:

- **increasing access for the citizens of Europe to the full range of Europe's education resources**, in support of and as a complement to policies pursued in the Member States;
- **innovation in these resources**: pilot projects initiated by the Commission need to be conducted to test new approaches and instruments (such as second-chance schools and the accreditation of skills). The point is to develop new approaches based on the pooling of experiences from different countries. A significant proportion of resources must therefore be set aside for such pilot projects whose subsequent introduction on a more widespread basis is of course principally a matter for national authorities;
- **wide dissemination of good practice in education** and better mutual knowledge of systems and activities. Systems for regular survey and analysis of education and training systems and youth policies in the Member States will enable political and economic decision-makers to improve the quality of their initiatives.

2. MORE FOCUSED ACTIVITIES

- For the purpose of constructing a European educational area, the achievements and experiences of the programmes in force up to 1999 constitute a solid foundation. Nevertheless it is necessary to focus the measures, as is shown by the analysis and evaluation of the programmes.
- **Six major types of action are envisaged:**
 - ◊ **Physical mobility:**
 - * Mobility will be available to the different target groups involved in the European educational area: students, school pupils, teachers, heads of educational establishments; apprentices/trainees, trainers and the social partners involved in vocational training; and the voluntary sector, youth groups and young volunteers;
 - * Such mobility would include extension of the arrangements for mutual recognition to the whole of the European area in the most systematic manner possible.
 - ◊ **Promotion of virtual mobility:**

We need:

 - * to promote universal access to new educational tools by advancing the creation of links between all the places where people learn communication/ information networks, and to do everything possible to ensure that they can be used at affordable cost levels;
 - * to stimulate the production and dissemination of European multimedia and audio-visual products and services which are appropriate for use for the education, training and youth. The issue here is to have access to suitable material with a genuinely

European educational content which reinforces the cultural identity of the Community;

- * to encourage the development of an appropriate education so that people in Europe, from the earliest age, are given the basic skills required for critical and responsible use of the information flow made available by the new media.
- ◇ Contributing to building up **cooperation networks** at European level in order to permit exchange of experience and good practice.
 - * These European cooperation networks must be in a position to pool what constitutes European excellence for a given subject or theme and to create a real European expertise capable of bringing to bear a more effective capacity for diagnosis and action.
 - ◇ Promotion of **language skills and the understanding of different cultures**: these will be a supporting activity to other types of activity and applied transversally:
 - * knowledge of languages and cultures is an essential part of the exercise of European citizenship;
 - * the virtual European education area will be all the richer and the more accessible to all if it is multilingual.
 - ◇ Pursuing **innovation** through pilot projects based on transnational partnerships to create education and training products or instruments for the accreditation of skills or to test new approaches and arrangements.
- Continuing improvement of **Community sources of reference** with regard to education, training and youth systems and policies in the Member States (key data, databases, mutual knowledge of education systems, etc.).
 - All these activities are designed and managed at a **transnational level**. Particular attention will be devoted to the implementation of **integrated projects** which bring together several different kinds of activity dealing with the same theme.

3. THE PARTIES INVOLVED

- Community action is not limited to actions initiated and piloted directly by the Commission. The central idea underlying the development of the new generation of activities is based on the establishment of a **framework of responsibilities shared between the Community, the Member States and the other parties involved**. This is also the **necessary condition** for the Europe of knowledge to take shape.
 - ◊ **The Member States.** Proposals will be submitted for arrangements to make the best use of innovative initiatives and experiments carried out in the Member States. The obligations and responsibilities of the Member States will be defined. The aim of Community activities will be to facilitate the transfer of good practice between them.
 - ◊ **Educational partners.** In the interests of broad dissemination of innovation, it is important to strengthen consultation with parents, with the representatives of the educational world (universities, schools, training centres, voluntary associations, the third sector), and with the business sector, particularly SMEs. This consultation will facilitate coping with the changes taking place in the work of teachers and trainers and in the methods and tools used.
 - ◊ **The social partners.** The social dialogue and the process of reaching agreement between the social partners at European level – particularly in the area of vocational training – should form a major component of this Community cooperation. Consultation with and between the partners on access to skills has already been advocated in the 1997 Report on Access to Continuing Training. Community activity will provide support to the dialogue between and with the social partners on all themes of common interest.
 - ◊ **Economic partners.** There must be a commitment to securing greater involvement of the business sector. Particular attention must be paid to training and especially management training in SMEs. Similarly, consultation needs to be further developed with the partners in the information society and those involved in disseminating educational products. The dividing line between the world of education and that of the information society is increasingly fluid, and connections need to be established in both directions to improve the quality of education products.
 - ◊ **Regional and local partners.** The organisation of Community activities must take account of the trend towards decentralisation of responsibilities observed in many Member States – particularly with regard to vocational training. The contribution of the regional/local levels – particularly the business sector which is involved in all forms of partnerships – must be properly taken into account. Those active at regional or local level will therefore see an enhancement of their role.
 - ◊ **Partners in the voluntary sector.** Community activities must attract the support of associations and foundations involved in actions of tangible

solidarity, and those involved in promoting integration through exchanges of young people or through voluntary service.

4. TARGETED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- This new policy is also an active participant in **the run-up to enlargement**. Education, training and youth programmes are already open to the EEA countries (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and are gradually opening up to those applicant countries participating in the pre-accession strategy (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia). The European Union has gradually moved from an approach based on assistance in the development of their systems to an approach based on cooperation, including cooperation with the 'Tempus' programme.
- As it seeks to focus these actions, the EU will have to strengthen its policy of cooperation and exchanges of experience and expertise with:
 - ◊ the Mediterranean countries: greater and better balanced involvement of these countries in cooperation activities is essential in order to guarantee mutual understanding and to strengthen the basis of political stability in the region;
 - ◊ the industrialised countries (USA, Canada, Japan, Russia, etc.): here the need is for an approach which is consistent with and appropriate to the specific advantages of cooperation activities with each of these countries.

II. A MORE INTEGRATED SET OF ARRANGEMENTS

1. LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

- This policy will be couched in legal instruments based on Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC). Common provisions will reflect the will for integration.
 - ◊ A common framework of activities, coordination and monitoring will detail the objectives, types of measures, common and experimental activities and the monitoring of good practices.
 - ◊ Three decisions based on Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty will define the specific framework for activities concerning the fields of education, training and youth. Each of these decisions will include common articles with a view to reinforcing consistency and expressing the will for common action, coordination and dissemination of good practice.

2. BUDGETARY RESOURCES AND COMPLEMENTARITY

- A Europe of knowledge will necessitate a debate on priorities and resources. When the follow-up to the White Paper was discussed, the European Parliament stressed in its opinion that budgetary resources commensurate with the aims must be made available.
- In its Agenda 2000 guidelines the Commission signalled its intention to submit budgetary proposals corresponding to an ambitious policy which may imply an increase in budgetary resources higher than the increase in GNP.
- Greater complementarity and synergy with other Community policies will be sought, but the Commission will take care to avoid any risk of duplication. Joint actions such as calls for proposals common to a number of programmes, for instance, or launching activities drawing on resources from several programmes, are effective ways of coordinating and building up common approaches.
- The Agenda 2000 guidelines for structural policy are a key factor for complementarity. The development of human resources will be a key element not only in Objective 1 and 2 regions but also throughout the EU, and will have to be pursued in a consistent manner. A new Objective 3 is envisaged to cover the regions lying outside Objectives 1 and 2 in order to help Member States to adapt and modernise their education and training systems. The knowledge policy will therefore dovetail well with the new structural policy.

3. STREAMLINED IMPLEMENTATION

VISIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- The Commission intends to raise the visibility of Community action and of the Union's aims. It will propose a limited number of objectives and activities corresponding very closely to the political priorities adopted at EU level.
- The Commission also intends to examine carefully how certain educational products and activities might benefit from the award of a European label based on criteria of quality and transnational cooperation.

PARTNERSHIPS

- The approach which we are putting forward is one of partnership, aiming to achieve consistency and better consultation with different types of interested parties :
 - ◊ the political authorities at national, regional and local level in the Member States;
 - ◊ the other (educational, social, economic and voluntary) parties involved in building the European educational area; and
 - ◊ the operators involved in implementation in close contact with the beneficiaries.

This partnership should ensure a better continuing political overview, wide-ranging consultation and appropriate implementation.

- The greater spirit of cooperation which should be the hallmark of the new generation of activities could also lead to bodies or processes being set up – with the support whenever necessary of the existing bodies – to enable the main parties involved at national level to better follow developments in Community action through national monitoring committees. The object would be to enable them to achieve a better understanding of the principles and aims of such action and thus to be in a better position to use the results for national policies.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- In order to enhance understanding of Community action and promote greater complementarity and consistency between the various Community policies affecting human resources, evaluation procedures will be improved.
- The steps taken at the Amsterdam European Council to further the coordination of employment policies show the considerable advantages which concerted follow-up at Community level would bring. The various reports currently provided for the action programmes will be replaced by regular progress reports from the Commission and the Member States on the extent to which the objectives of the programme are being fulfilled and on the obstacles encountered.

IMPROVED AND SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURES

- With the implementation of programmes deploying ever greater resources, management arrangements have evolved. This evolution took account, notably, of differing situations arising from the variety of management cultures, diversity in funding arrangements, multi-annual contract management, and centralised or decentralised management. An audit policy has been pursued to review and develop contract rules.
- The Commission will make easily accessible points of contact and decision-making available to the public. For the management of day-to-day affairs, it will put forward proposals for decentralisation of decisions to the levels closest to the parties concerned. It will study the conditions which would allow a greater degree of management responsibility to be delegated to certain broadly-based types of projects or networks, or to public-private partnerships.
- This greater degree of decentralisation – which will be all the more necessary in view of the substantial growth in the number of countries taking part in the future programmes – will be accompanied by measures to strengthen the Commission's capacity to carry out not only its responsibilities in terms of management and supervision of budget execution, but also the crucial functions of **stimulation**, **coordination** of decentralised management structures and follow-up and dissemination of results.
- The need is to progress towards an arrangement which favours a genuine management partnership between all the levels involved and which improves **cofinancing** arrangements with public and private sources, nationally, regionally and locally.
- The Commission will propose an improved organisation and distribution of **structures for assistance** and operational management. In particular, the national agencies must step up their role of assisting promoters, particularly as regards the identification of partners, counselling applicants and taking a full part in monitoring and evaluation activities.
- **Simplification** should lead to more user-friendly access to Community aid, particularly by reducing decision-making time, simplifying administrative procedures and reducing the number of single-establishment contracts as part of a global grant approach. While fully respecting the general rules on accounting, proposals will be examined to introduce more flexibility, e.g. by providing for multi-annual funding procedures or phasing projects to take account of the different stages of feasibility, preparation, implementation and dissemination.

ISSN 0254-1475

COM(97) 563 final

DOCUMENTS

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04 05 16

Catalogue number : CB-CO-97-623-EN-C

ISBN 92-78-27649-9

Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

L-2985 Luxembourg

11