

ITEMS DEBATED

446.1

27 (20)

A EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE

Policy debate

The Council held a policy debate on the importance of education and training in the knowledge society/economy, on the basis of a discussion paper drawn up by the Presidency. The debate took place with reference to the concept of a Europe of knowledge, following the Commission's formal presentation of its two Communications: "*Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe*" and "*The role of Universities in the Europe of knowledge*". The Commission's Synthesis Report on the "Lisbon Strategy" of economic, social and environmental renewal, "*Choosing to grow: knowledge, innovation and jobs in a cohesive society*", was also used as a basis for the debate.

Ministers were asked to address the following two questions:

- the implications of the shift towards "sustainable employability" in education and training, particularly as regards the relative weight of their non-utilitarian aspects (e.g. personal development, citizenship) vis-à-vis their role in preparing individuals for professional life;
- the need for greater strategic coherence at Community level between the area of education and training and other policy areas, in particular as regards the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the Union's strategy to fight social exclusion.

All delegations agreed on the important role played by education and training both in terms of promoting personal development and fulfilment – with a particular emphasis on aspects such as active citizenship, social cohesion and inclusion – and in facilitating people's employability. Several delegations underscored the complementary nature of these two dimensions. Member States also stressed the important contribution of education and training to competitiveness and job growth especially in the light of the objectives set by the Lisbon European Council (March 2000).

Some delegations referred to the current economic situation which might not always allow for substantial increases in investment in education and training and welcomed the Commission's call for better and more targeted investment in this field (i.e. putting available resources where their impact may be more significant).

Some delegations mentioned the important role played by the Social Partners in this field and favoured consultation at European level with a view to integrating their perspectives in the overall discussion.

The President thanked delegations for their fruitful contributions and stressed the importance of this debate in the construction of a Europe of knowledge.

Conclusions

The Council also approved Conclusions in the context of the discussion on a Europe of knowledge on the importance of education and training in the knowledge society/economy in Europe and their role in the achievement of the "Lisbon Strategy". The proposed Conclusions are part of the Council's contribution to the Spring European Council (March 2003) and will be submitted, once formally adopted at a forthcoming Council meeting, as a relevant background document for consideration by the European Council.

– ***Report to the European Council on 21 March 2003 on the Lisbon Strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal - Council conclusions***

"The importance of education and training in the knowledge society and economy in Europe and their role in the achievement of the Lisbon strategy have been underlined frequently and firmly since March 2000. This is also recognised in terms of policy and investment priorities in the Commission's Synthesis Report to the 2003 Spring European Council.

The Council draws attention to the action under way to implement the Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe, which emphasises employability as well as such other dimensions as social cohesion, citizenship or linguistic diversity as reaffirmed in the European Council conclusions of Barcelona (15-16 March 2002). The Council reaffirms its commitment to preparing the interim report on this in time for the Spring 2004 European Council.

The Council suggests that the European Council endorses these efforts and in particular:

- ◆ explicitly supports the current activities aimed at creating sufficient coherence, compatibility and attractiveness in education and training in Europe, in particular through the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme on the Objectives, including the Copenhagen Declaration on vocational education and training and through further encouragement of the Bologna process in higher education;
- ◆ stresses the continued need for resolute steps forward to foster transparency, the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance in the European Union, whilst respecting Member States' responsibilities ;
- ◆ underlines the importance of enhancing the promotion of European education and training systems and institutions as worldwide references;
- ◆ stresses the importance of the next generation of Community programmes in the education and training field for the attainment of the Lisbon goals as reflected in the Detailed Work Programme on the Objectives;
- ◆ stresses the importance of efficient and effective investments for the further development of education and training systems."