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- EDUCATION AND YOUTH AFFAIRS -

Brussels, 14 February 2002

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¹ Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally agreed by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.

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* * *

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Ms Viviane REDING

Member

OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS – WORK PROGRAMME

As instructed by the Stockholm European Council, the Council and the Commission gave their agreement to a report containing a detailed work programme on the follow-up of the future concrete objectives of education and training systems in Europe. The report will now be submitted to the European Council meeting in Barcelona on 15 and 16 March 2002.

The report highlights the essential role to be played by education and training in improving the level of qualifications of the population. It seeks to respond not only to the challenges issued by the Lisbon European Council in March 2002 – to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world – but also to the wider needs of citizens and society. Education and training are thus a basic priority area in the Lisbon strategy.

The report – prepared jointly by the Council and the Commission – is made up of the following sections:

- an executive summary for general information;
- a more political introductory section;
- the body of the report containing the actual work programme for the three strategic objectives (improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU; facilitating the access of all to education and training systems and opening-up education and training systems to the wider world);
- a timetable to start follow-up work for objectives;
- a table to serve as a model to be used in the follow-up of quantitative indicators;
- illustrative statistical data.

The report contains a detailed work programme for achieving the thirteen objectives of the European education and training systems, and it identifies some forty key issues, a follow-up timetable and, where appropriate, indicators and subjects concerning which exchanges of experience and good practice or a peer review could be carried out, using the Open Method of Coordination between Member States.

Work has already begun on the three areas defined as having priority in 2001 – basic skills, information and communication technologies and mathematics, science and technology – and so the aim is to start work on the ten other areas by 2003 at the latest.

Outline of the report

The report reflects the European institutions' determination to meet the challenges of the knowledge-based society, globalisation and the enlargement of the European Union. It sets ambitious but realistic goals for that purpose. For the benefit of citizens and the Union as a whole, the intention is that, in the sphere of education and training, the following will be achieved by 2010:

- *the highest quality will be achieved in education and training and Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions;*
- *education and training systems in Europe will be compatible enough to allow citizens to move between them and to take advantage of their diversity;*
- *holders of qualifications, knowledge and skills acquired anywhere in the EU will be able to get them effectively validated throughout the Union for the purpose of career and further learning;*
- *Europeans, at all ages, will have access to lifelong learning;*
- *Europe will be open to cooperation for mutual benefits with all other regions and should be the most-favoured destination of students, scholars and researchers from other world regions.*

Achieving the agreed objectives will draw on policy cooperation using the new Open Method of Coordination in order to enhance the added value of European action. This is based on the identification of shared concerns and objectives, the dissemination of good practice and the measurement of progress through agreed instruments, comparing achievements both between European countries and with the rest of the world. It is planned that the arrangements for the effective participation of candidate countries will be worked out at the next informal meeting of Education Ministers from EU and candidate countries in June 2002 in Bratislava.

SUMMARY REPORT TO THE BARCELONA EUROPEAN COUNCIL: "THE LISBON STRATEGY – MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN"

The Council heard a presentation by Commissioner REDING of the Commission's summary report to the European Council in Barcelona (15 and 16 March 2002), entitled "The Lisbon Strategy – Making Change Happen", which focused on the educational content of the report.

Since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, an annual European Council meeting has been held in the spring. On the basis of a summary report from the Commission, this looks at the progress made in implementing the strategy set out at Lisbon, namely to make of the European Union "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".

The report, which was adopted by the Commission on 16 January 2002, reviews the developments since Lisbon. A large part of it is devoted to education and training.

EUROPEAN AREA OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The Council held an in-depth exchange of views on the basis of the Commission communication on making a European area of lifelong learning a reality. The subject was discussed both by the Education Ministers and by the Youth Affairs Ministers. The Feira European Council in June 2000 instructed the Member States, the Council and Commission to draw up, each within their own sphere of competence, coherent strategies and practical measures to make lifelong learning accessible to all. The subject is of particular importance for the preparation of the Barcelona European Council in March 2002.

The Education Ministers commented on a large number of points in the Commission document, while the Youth Affairs Ministers concentrated more particularly on non-formal education. The Council was unanimous in stressing the crucial importance of lifelong learning both for the personal and professional development of European citizens and for achieving the strategic objective defined at the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

While all the priorities suggested by the Commission were deemed important, several Member States saw a European added value, especially in terms of the valuing of knowledge and its recognition beyond national borders.

In conclusion, the President observed that it had been a good discussion and announced the Presidency's intention to draw up two documents on the basis of the interventions that had been made: a document summarising the Member States' various positions which would be forwarded to the Barcelona European Council in March, and a text for submission to the next Education and Youth Affairs Council meeting on 30 May which would cover the latest lifelong learning measures. The Youth Affairs Ministers agreed to submit a contribution for the discussion initiated by the Education Ministers.

It is recalled that, in its Communication, the Commission proposes the creation of a true European area of lifelong learning so that citizens may acquire new knowledge and skills at any time in life; the intention being to deal with the shortcomings in terms of lifelong training that exist in most European countries.

The Commission proposes six building blocks to help Member States and economic and social players in the development and implementation of their strategies. The building blocks are: development of partnerships, a detailed analysis of learning requirements, an increase in public and private investment in learning, access to learning opportunities, valuing learning, and introducing quality control.

ACTION PLAN ON BASIC SKILLS AND MOBILITY

The Council heard a presentation by Commissioner REDING of the action plan adopted by the Commission on 13 February 2002 on basic skills and mobility, which is an important part of the preparations for the Barcelona European Council in March 2002.

The purpose of the action plan is to promote workers' mobility and the opening up of new labour markets to European workers; the aim being to remove obstacles to mobility to enable workers to move about within the European Union. It also makes specific proposals for more uniform, more transparent and more flexible arrangements for recognising qualifications and diplomas and periods of study. To that end, the action plan proposes 25 specific measures, 15 of which relate to education and training in particular.

The Stockholm European Council in March 2001 requested the Commission to present this document. Subsequently, the Commission set up a high-level task force made up of experts from business, the world of education and the two sides of industry. This task force submitted its recommendations on 14 December 2001, on the basis of which the Commission drew up its action plan.

TEMPUS/MEDA PROGRAMME

The Council heard a presentation by Commissioner REDING of her recent proposal for a Decision to extend the TEMPUS programme to Mediterranean third countries in order to encourage cooperation in university exchanges. The Commission proposes to add a new objective relating to the development of democratic civic societies to those of TEMPUS III which is currently in force. The proposal for a Decision also provides for researchers to be included among those eligible under the programme. Finally, the Commission proposes to prolong the TEMPUS III decision until 2006, thus aligning it on the other Community programmes in this area such as SOCRATES and LEONARDO.

WHITE PAPER ON YOUTH POLICY - Conclusions

The Council held a discussion on the White Paper which the Commission adopted on 21 November 2001 and in which it sets out its vision of the future policy on youth in the European Union. The Council also adopted operational conclusions which provide for setting up a follow-up strategy in terms of procedure and working methods and which are set out below.

During the discussion the Ministers raised, in particular, the priorities which should be adopted, working methods, and the question of participation by candidate countries and young people themselves in this process. They laid stress on the need to make rapid progress, with specific measures, and thanked the Spanish Presidency for giving the Youth Affairs Ministers the opportunity to meet on two occasions during the first half of 2002.

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

Whereas

the Commission White Paper entitled "A New Impetus for European Youth" is the outcome of an extensive consultation process which has been ongoing since the end of 1999. This initiative, which has received the unqualified backing of the Member States, successive Presidencies and the European Parliament, suggests a new framework for European cooperation in the youth field;

the Youth Council of 29 November 2001 under the Belgian Presidency welcomed with considerable interest the publication of the White Paper and the proposals contained in it and proposed further in-depth discussions aimed at defining the framework for future cooperation;

the White Paper was presented at the seminar in Ghent from 26 to 28 November, where its importance as a first stage in the process of establishing a more comprehensive, consistent and intersectoral youth policy was emphasised, in particular by the young;

at the Director-Generals' meeting on 10 December, discussions on the priorities and methods proposed in the White Paper, consultations with the young and the desire to involve candidate countries in the debate were taken a stage further and the need to define positions and to adopt decisions insofar as is possible under each Member State's internal consultation process was put forward.

Having regard to the answers given by the Members States to the questionnaire established by the Presidency on the key issues of the White Paper:

1. RECOGNISES that the European Commission's White Paper "Youth: a new impetus for European Youth", drafted following extensive consultation with all the relevant actors in the youth sector and welcomed, by the Council (Education and Youth) on 29 November 2001, implies the creation of a new European cooperation in youth affairs and provides the basis for initiating a framework in this sector.
2. CONSIDERS that the approach proposed by the Commission: namely cooperation in the youth field using the Open Method of Coordination in a specifically adapted way and taking the youth dimension into account in other sectoral policies are both appropriate and feasible with a view to intensifying cooperation among States and making the youth dimension more visible and transparent among young people throughout Europe.
3. AGREES with the importance of the priorities proposed by the White Paper in the specific youth field: participation, voluntary service, information and research.
4. WELCOMES the adaptation to the youth field of the Open Method of Coordination proposed by the White Paper, the implementation of which is still to be defined by the Council, while fully respecting Member States' competence and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, in order to strengthen the policy of cooperation in youth affairs using a flexible approach.
5. STRESSES the need to include the youth dimension in sectoral policies and programmes both at national and European level, in accordance with the priorities set out in the White Paper, and the need to explore further the concept of autonomy of young people, with a view to adopting appropriate measures.
6. RECOGNISES the importance of the role of young people in participating in the cooperation process both at the national and at the European level.
7. AFFIRMS moreover that the candidate countries be included, as appropriate, in the cooperation process in youth affairs proposed by the White Paper.
8. UNDERTAKES to pursue work towards drawing up a framework (common goals, timetable, working methods and follow-up) for cooperation in youth affairs with a view to adoption at the Council (Education and Youth) at its forthcoming meeting on 30 May 2002."

In its White Paper, the Commission proposes to set up a new European Union framework for cooperation in youth policy. Such cooperation will take its inspiration from existing national and Community activities, but will also be based on application of the open method of coordination to the more specific area of youth policy and taking account of the youth dimension in the development of policies. The Commission proposes acting at two levels: enhanced cooperation between the Member States, and taking more account of specifically youth-related factors in sectoral policies.

ITEMS APPROVED WITHOUT DEBATE

The documents whose references are given are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>. Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements may be obtained by following the procedure indicated above or from the Press Office.)

EDUCATION/YOUTH

Following the Education and Youth Affairs Council meeting on 29 November 2001 (see 14388/01 Presse 437), the Council formally adopted the:

- Resolution on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001 (14757/01);
- opinion of the Education Council concerning the education and training issues in the proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for 2002 (14758/01);
- conclusions on the follow-up to the report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems in view of the preparation of a joint Council/Commission report to be presented to the Spring 2002 European Council (14863/01);
- Resolution on the added value of voluntary work for young people in the context of the development of Community action on youth (14759/01).

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Insurance undertakings – solvency margin requirement *

In accepting all of the amendments voted by the European Parliament at first reading which are also in line with the agreement reached at the Internal Market Council meeting on 30 and 31 May 2001, the Council formally adopted the Directives:

- amending Council Directive 73/239/EEC as regards the solvency margin requirements for non-life insurance undertakings (3631/01 + 5627/02);
- amending Council Directive 79/267/EEC as regards the solvency margin requirements for life assurance undertakings (3630/01 + 5627/02).

Both directives aim to modernise the solvency margin requirements that have been applied for more than 20 years, particularly in respect of the methodology of calculation.

INTERNAL MARKET**Cosmetic products - animal testing**

The Council adopted its common position on the amendment of Council Directive 76/768/EEC laying down detailed arrangements for a definitive ban on animal testing for cosmetic products (15073/01), in accordance with the political agreement obtained by a qualified majority at its meeting on 26 November 2001, with the Austrian delegation voting against and the German, Netherlands and Danish delegations abstaining. The common position will now be formally sent to the European Parliament for a second reading under the codecision procedure.

The text approved by the Council provides for prohibition of:

- the marketing of cosmetic products the final formulation of which has been the subject of animal testing and of cosmetic products containing ingredients which have been the subject of animal testing using a method other than an alternative method after such alternative method has been validated, accepted and published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
- the performance of animal testing of finished cosmetic products;
- the performance of animal testing of ingredients or combinations of ingredients where such testing may be replaced by one or more alternative methods listed in Annex V to Council Directive 67/548/EEC on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances or in Annex IX to this Directive.

In accordance with the common position, the Commission will draw up Annex IX at the latest 18 months after the adoption of the Directive, following a Regulatory Committee procedure and after consulting a Scientific Committee, including alternative methods which offer consumers a degree of protection equivalent to the animal testing which they aim to replace.

AGRICULTURE**Marketing of material for the vegetative propagation of the vine ***

The Council adopted the Directive on the marketing of material for the vegetative propagation of the vine (14685/01 + 5794/2/02).

The aim of the Directive is to remove all barriers to trade likely to prevent the free movement of vine-propagating material in the Community. It authorises, on certain conditions, the marketing of propagating material produced by new production methods.

As vine-propagating material is composed of modified vine varieties, the Directive provides for measures relating in particular to risk assessment, labelling and public information to avoid any risk to human health or the environment.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS**"TELECOM package" ***

The Council, in accordance with Article 251(3) of the Treaty, approved in the form of amended common positions the:

- Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive), with Portugal abstaining in respect of the amendments to this Directive (3672/01 + 5754/02);
- Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities (Access Directive) (3670/01);
- Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the authorisation of electronic communications networks and services (Authorisation Directive) (3671/01);
- Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive) (3673/01);
- Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a regulatory framework for radio spectrum policy in the European Community (Radio Spectrum Decision) (3674/01).

On 12 July 2000 the Commission adopted a package of proposals for a regulatory framework for electronic communications infrastructure and services. This "Telecom package" consisted of five legislative harmonisation Directives for adoption by the European Parliament and the Council (one framework Directive and four specific Directives) and a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on radio spectrum policy in the Community; a draft Commission Directive on competition in the markets for electronic communications services constitutes the final element of this package.

The Council adopted common positions on the four abovementioned Directives on 17 September 2001 and a common position on the Radio Spectrum Decision on 16 October 2001. At its meeting on 12 December 2001, the European Parliament adopted, at second reading, a number of amendments to the Council common positions on each of the five legislative acts.

HEALTH**Human blood and blood components - quality and safety standards**

The Council adopted its common position on the amendment of Directive 89/381/EEC setting high standards of quality and safety for the collection, testing, processing, storage, and distribution of human blood and blood components (14402/01), in accordance with the unanimous agreement of principle obtained at its meeting on 15 November 2001. The common position will now be forwarded to the European Parliament for a second reading under the co-decision procedure.

The proposal aims to set standards of quality and safety to be applied for the greater part of the blood transfusion chain from pre-donation to distribution of these substances for therapeutic use.
