



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6150/06 (Presse 42)

PRESS RELEASE

2710th Council Meeting

Education, Youth and Culture

Brussels, 23 February 2006

President **Ms Elisabeth Gehrler**, Federal Minister for Education,
Science and Culture, and
Ms Ursula Haubner, Federal Minister for Social Security,
Generations and Consumer Protection
of Austria

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B - 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 285 8716 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 285 8026
press.office@consilium.eu.int <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom>

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Main Results of the Council

*The Council adopted a Regulation establishing a multi-annual plan for the **sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole** in the Bay of Biscay.*

*The Council adopted a Directive on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the **exposure of workers to risks arising from physical agents** (artificial optical radiation).*

*The Council adopted a Common Position with a view to the adoption of a Directive laying down technical requirements for **inland waterway vessels** and repealing Directive 82/174/EEC.*

*The Council adopted contributions addressed to the **Spring European Council**.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- The documents whose references are given in the text 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 are available on the abovementioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Ms Fadila LAANAN

Minister for Culture, the Audiovisual Sector and Youth,
French Community

Mr Frank VANDENBROUCKE

Vice-Minister-President of the Flemish Government and
Flemish Minister for Work, Education and Training

Czech Republic:

Ms Alena ŠTĚRBOVÁ

Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Sport

Denmark:

Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN

Deputy Permanent Representative

Germany:

Mr Gerd HOOFE

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior
Citizens, Women and Youth

Mr Frieder MEYER-KRAHMER

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education and
Research

Estonia:

Mr Tiit NABER

Deputy Permanent Representative

Greece:

Ms Marietta GIANNAKOU

Minister for Education and Religious Affairs

Spain:

Ms María Jesús SANSEGUNDO GÓMEZ DE CADIÑANOS

Minister for Education and Science

France:

Mr Gilles de ROBIEN

Minister for National Education, Higher Education and
Research

Mr Jean-François LAMOUR

Minister for Youth, Sport, and Voluntary Organisations
and Associations

Ireland:

Mr Kenneth THOMPSON

Deputy Permanent Representative

Italy:

Ms Valentina APREA

State Secretary for Education, the Universities and
Research

Cyprus:

Mr Pefkios GEORGIADES

Minister for Education and Culture

Latvia:

Ms Ina DRUVIETE

Minister for Education and Science

Lithuania:

Ms Vilija BLINKEVIČIŪTĖ

Minister for Social Security and Labour

Mr Remigijus MOTUZAS

Minister for Education and Science

Luxembourg:

Ms Mady DELVAUX-STEHRES

Minister for Education and Vocational Training

Ms Marie-Josée JACOBS

Minister for the Family and Integration, Minister for Equal
Opportunities

Hungary:

Mr Bálint MAGYAR

Minister for Education

Malta:

Ms Theresa CUTAJAR

Deputy Permanent Representative

Netherlands:

Ms Maria van der HOEVEN

Minister for Education, Cultural Affairs and Science

Austria:

Ms Elisabeth GEHRER
Ms Ursula HAUBNER

Federal Minister for Education, Science and Culture
Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and
Consumer Protection

Poland:

Mr Stefan JURGA

Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Education and Science

Portugal:

Mr Jorge PEDREIRA

State Secretary for Education, attached to the Minister for
Education

Slovenia:

Mr Milan ZVER

Minister for Education and Sport

Slovakia:

Mr Juraj NOCIAR

Deputy Permanent Representative

Finland:

Mr Antti KALLIOMÄKI

Minister for Education

Sweden:

Ms Lena HALLENGREN

Minister at the Ministry of Education and Culture, with
responsibility for Pre-School Education, Youth Affairs
and Adult Education

United Kingdom:

Ms Anne LAMBERT

Deputy Permanent Representative

.....

Commission:

Mr Ján Figel'

Member

.....

The Governments of the Acceding States were represented as follows:

Bulgaria:

Mr Daniel VALTCHEV

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education and
Science

Romania:

Ms Paloma PETRESCU

Secretary of State

ITEMS DEBATED

EDUCATION

– *Preparation of the Spring European Council*

The Council was briefed by the Commission on its 2006 annual report addressed to the Spring European Council in the context of the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs: "*Time to move up a gear*" (5745/06).

The Commissioner gave special relevance to the education elements, concluding that there is a need to accelerate the reforms at national level.

Among other measures, the report proposes to increase investment in universities up to 2% of GDP. Some delegations had doubts about the possibility and the opportunity for such an increase.

Some delegations would like to give more relevance to the problems raised by early school leaving.

Part I of the report, "*The new partnership for growth and jobs*", evaluates the process of drawing up national reform programmes and highlights a number of key initiatives for agreement at the European Council.

Part II, "*Country chapters*", is a detailed assessment of the national reform programmes, pointing out their strengths as well as areas where they need review and updating by Member States.

The first cycle of implementation of the Lisbon strategy, as re-launched last year, will culminate in messages from the Spring 2006 European Council pointing out the strategy for the year ahead. The Commission progress report on the national reform programmes is intended to be a contribution in this context.

– ***Education and training 2010 work programme – key messages***

The Council, jointly with the Commission, adopted the 2006 joint interim report on progress achieved within the context of the "*Education and training 2010 work programme*", a programme established to follow up the objectives set by the Lisbon reform agenda as regards education and training systems in Europe.

The revised Lisbon strategy having confirmed the central place of education and training within the European Union agenda for growth and jobs, the 2005 Spring European Council requested that the "*Education and training 2010*" work programme should continue to be implemented in full. The joint interim report, entitled "*Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe*" (5767/06), gives a picture of progress already made on implementing the work programme and proposes measures to be taken for further improvements.

The Council further adopted the following key messages addressed to the Spring European Council on the contribution of education and training for the objectives of the renewed Lisbon strategy, growth, jobs and social cohesion:

"Education and training are vital for growth, jobs and social cohesion

- Education and training contribute significantly to the solution to the growing socio-economic and demographic challenges with which the EU is confronted in a globalised world: too high a level of unemployment, a large number of low-skilled people, an ageing population and a crucial need to improve the level of competences and qualifications of all citizens.
- Education and training are critical factors if the EU's long-term potential for excellence, innovation and competitiveness, as well as for social cohesion, is to be sustained. The dual role – social and economic – of education and training therefore needs to be reaffirmed, as well as the need to ensure the development of high quality systems which are both efficient and equitable. There can be no trade-off between these two dimensions. The search for excellence at all levels of education and training, including through better links between higher education, research and enterprises as recently discussed by the Heads of State and Government at Hampton Court, should go hand in hand with a search for greater access, social inclusion and active citizenship.
- Education and training must be viewed as a priority for investment. The high returns it provides substantially outweigh the costs and reach far beyond 2010. In this context, the new Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 will be essential. The "Education & Training 2010" process must occupy a central position in the implementation of the national Lisbon reform programmes and the annual progress report at EU level.

Progress is being made but more substantial efforts are required in key areas

- Reforms in education and training are moving forward, but more substantial efforts are required. Lifelong learning has been recognised as a *sine qua non* for reaching the Lisbon goals. Member States should as a matter of priority mobilise all necessary means to implement coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. Peer-learning activities and the use of research results will make an important contribution in this respect. To support greater mobility and an efficient European labour market, progress on a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should also be achieved.
- Investments, coupled with relevant quality assurance mechanisms, should be targeted on areas where economic returns and social outcomes are high. These areas include improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training and higher education, the acquisition by all of key competences including language skills, pre-primary education, the reduction of early school leaving, the professional development of teachers, trainers and school leaders, and adult learning. Greater and more targeted use of the structural funds, especially the European Social Fund, for education and training must be secured.
- To enhance the effectiveness and impact of reforms and to share responsibilities and costs, governance should be strengthened, involving relevant stakeholders, in particular through effective inter-ministerial synergies and diverse learning partnerships at all levels (institutions, public authorities, social partners, enterprises, sectoral, regional and local organisations). Concerted efforts are needed by all, if the target of making European education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 is to be achieved."

– ***Key competences for lifelong learning***

Pending the Opinion of the European Parliament, the Council held an exchange of views on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, covering *inter alia* the following topic (5758/06):

Are the eight key competences outlined in the proposal for a Recommendation broadly those which all individuals need in the context of lifelong learning and, if so, how should they be promoted?

The delegations agreed that the eight competences outlined in the proposal are necessary for individuals to live in the current knowledge-based societies, even though some delegations considered that other competences could be added to the list, such as basic knowledge of the European Union.

Some delegations noted that it might be better to refer to the language of instruction rather than the mother tongue, which is not necessarily the same.

The outcome of the debate will be used as a reference for future examination of the proposal for a recommendation.

The proposal for a recommendation aims at giving an answer to a mandate first given by the 2000 Lisbon European Council ("*Every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society*") and reiterated and developed in the "*Education and Training 2010*" work programme adopted by the Barcelona Council in March 2002, which also called for further action to "*improve the mastery of basic skills*" and to strengthen the European dimension in education. This work was to focus on identifying the basic skills and how, together with traditional skills, they could be better integrated in the curricula, learned, and maintained through life. Basic skills should be genuinely available for everyone, including for those with special needs, school drop-outs and adult learners. Validation of basic skills should be promoted to support further learning and employability.

The proposal for a recommendation aims at establishing a European reference tool defining the basic skills (*key competences*) that need to be provided to all citizens, through lifelong learning, to contribute to achieving personal fulfilment, active participation and improving a person's employability in knowledge-based economies and societies.

The key competences would be:

- Communication in the mother tongue

- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civic competences;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- Cultural awareness and expression.

The proposal further establishes how the key competences can be accessed through lifelong learning.

Legal basis proposed: Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty – qualified majority required for a Council decision; co-decision procedure with the European Parliament applicable.

– *The European indicator of language competence*

The Council held a policy debate on a Commission communication on "*The European indicator of language competence*", covering, in particular, the following topics:

- the approach outlined in the Commission communication towards the establishment of the European indicator of language competence (EILC);
- the establishment of an advisory board composed of a representative of each Member State whose initial mandate would be to clarify/define the parameters for implementation;
- as regards the main parameters for the EILC:
 - (i) *the level of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) at which data should be gathered on competences in first and second foreign languages from a representative sample of pupils in education and training;*
 - (ii) *because respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union, the indicator should be based upon data concerning the knowledge of all the official languages of the European Union taught as foreign languages in the Union, but for practical reasons it would be advisable, in the first round of data-gathering, for tests to be made available in those official languages of the European Union that are most widely taught in the Member States, to the extent that they provide a sufficiently large sample of testees.*

The debate was focused on a number of issues, which would facilitate the further work which was needed with a view to adopting a set of conclusions at the May Council.

There was broad agreement on the advisability of establishing an Advisory Board whose primary task would be to define the parameters of the indicator.

Concerning the main parameters for the EILC, there were differences of opinion on the level of education stage at which evaluation should be carried out.

While a large majority of delegations agreed that ultimately the Indicator should be available in all official EU languages, most could accept, for practical reasons, a limitation during the first round of data gathering to the most widely taught languages in the Member States. In addition, some delegations recalled that in their countries there was more than one national language and that such particularities should be taken into account so as to ensure comparability of data in the first round.

In its communication (11704/05), the Commission states that:

"At the European Council meeting in Barcelona, Heads of State and Government called for the establishment of a European indicator of language competence. (...)The final objective is to provide Member States with hard data on which any necessary adjustments in their approach to foreign language teaching and learning can be based."

The Commission invites the Council to agree with the approach outlined in the communication concerning the implementation of the European indicator of language competence.

The indicator should also be seen in the context of the range of indicators that Member States have agreed to develop through the "*Education and training 2010*" process.

– *A new framework strategy for multilingualism*

The Commission presented its communication on "*A new framework strategy for multilingualism*" (14908/05).

The communication, the first one in this policy area,

- *reaffirms the Commission's commitment to multilingualism in the European Union;*
- *sets out the Commission's strategy for promoting multilingualism in European society, in the economy and in the Commission itself; and*
- *proposes a number of specific actions stemming from this strategic framework.*

Multilingualism is defined in the communication as *the new field of Commission policy that promotes a climate that is conducive to the full expression of all languages, in which the teaching and learning of a variety of languages can flourish*. The communication further states that the Commission's multilingualism policy has three aims:

- to encourage language learning and promoting linguistic diversity in society
- to promote a healthy multilingual economy, and
- to give citizens access to European legislation, procedures and information in their own languages.

YOUTH

– *Preparation of the Spring European Council*

The Commission presented to the (Youth) Council its communication addressed to the European Council in the context of the renewed Lisbon strategy: "*Time to move up a gear*" (5745/06).

It is recalled that in March 2005, the European Council adopted a Pact for Youth as one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the re-launched Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. The Pact for Youth was included in the *integrated guidelines* that form the basis for Member States' national reform programmes, on which the Commission published its first annual progress report "*Time to move up a gear*".

The Council then held an exchange of views on the basis of this annual progress report.

Delegations referred to the following aspects:

- the advantages of using the open method of coordination and of sharing best practices in this context;
- the need to involve young people in the decision procedure, for those decisions which concern them;
- the need to integrate young people into the labour market, providing targeted training for early school leavers or integrating them, as a transitional measure between school and work, in voluntary civic services;
- the need to help young people to reconcile private and professional lives;
- the advantages of ensuring mobility for young people, not only to improve their employment prospects, but also to bring them into contact with different cultures and engender the feeling of being European.

– ***Implementation of the European Pact for Youth – contribution to the Spring European Council*** - Council conclusions

The Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD TO

1. the objective, set by the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000 and reaffirmed by the Stockholm European Council on 23 and 24 March 2001, of making 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"*;
2. the White Paper entitled *A new impetus for European youth*, adopted by the Commission on 21 November 2001¹, which recognises that *"this strategy sets new goals for different policy fields which are closely related to youth, such as education, employment, social inclusion, information and civil society"*;
3. the Green Paper of 21 March 2005 entitled *Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations*, which underlined that greater efforts are needed to integrate young people into the labour market and to support them as they pursue "non-linear" careers, alternating between employment, study, unemployment and retraining or the updating of skills;
4. the conclusions of the European Council of 22 and 23 March 2005 adopting the European Pact for Youth as one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives of growth and jobs, aiming to improve the education, training, mobility, vocational integration and social inclusion of young Europeans, while facilitating the reconciliation of working life and family life;
5. the Commission Communication of 30 May 2005 on European policies concerning youth entitled *Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship*²;

¹ 14441/01 - COM(2001) 681 final.

² 9679/05 - COM (2005) 206 final.

6. the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008)¹, proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the Council, that should be taken into account by Member States and reported on in their national reform programmes;
7. the Commission Communication of 10 November 2005 entitled Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe²;
8. the Council Resolution of 15 November 2005 on addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship³;
9. the Commission Communication of 22 December 2005 entitled Working together, working better: a new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union⁴;
10. the Commission's Annual Progress Report of 25 January 2006 on implementing the Lisbon Strategy, and its annexes, based on the national reform programmes of the Member States presented to the Commission in autumn 2005;

UNDERLINE

11. that young people constitute a valuable resource for both the present and the future, and contribute to the creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship that Europe needs in order to fulfil the aims of the Lisbon Strategy;
12. that young people face many challenges, particularly in accessing the labour market, with youth unemployment on average double the overall rate within the EU;
13. the importance of a youth perspective in the Lisbon Strategy and the key contribution which implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, the open method of coordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion, the Structural Funds, the European Research Framework Programmes and other relevant programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning, Youth and future "Youth in Action" Programmes, can make towards achieving the objectives of the Youth Pact;

¹ 8008/05 - COM(2005) 141 final.

² 13415/1/05 REV 1 - COM(2005) 549 final.

³ OJ C 292, 24.11.2005, p.5.

⁴ 5070/06 - COM(2005) 706 final.

14. the need to promote the social inclusion of young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, so as to foster social cohesion;
15. the importance for young people of policies aimed at balancing work and family life, particularly given the challenges posed by demographic change;
16. the relevance of non-formal and informal learning and young people's mobility, supported by instruments such as the Youth Programme and the future "Youth in Action" Programme 2007–2013, to helping young people develop a wide range of skills and competences;
17. the importance of promoting a structured dialogue with young people, youth organisations and those active in the youth field at all levels;

CONSIDER that

18. as outlined in the Commission's 2006 Annual Progress Report, the response to the Youth Pact in most Member States has been encouraging, but that urgent action is still required to facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market in line with the Pact;
19. the adoption of the European Pact for Youth has strengthened the involvement of ministries responsible for youth in the Lisbon process, leading to better internal coordination and reinforced mainstreaming of the youth dimension when developing policies on employment, social inclusion, education, training and mobility, in line with the mandate from the European Council;
20. while many Member States refer explicitly to the Pact in their national reform programmes and others include measures that are consistent with it, better implementation of the objectives of the Pact and improved visibility of the Pact in the national reform programmes and in the Commission's Annual Progress Report would lead to more coherence, greater effectiveness and clearer monitoring of measures for young people, and would help to develop knowledge and expertise on the different areas of the Pact and the links between them;
21. while progress has been made, the European Commission and the Member States need to reinforce measures to implement the Pact by:
 - improving the employment situation of young people through strengthening employability and entrepreneurship and providing support for the transition from education and training to work;

- ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities are a priority in terms of national employment and social inclusion policies;
- reducing the numbers of early school leavers and developing closer cooperation on transparency and recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning;

22. Member States and the Commission should also develop and support measures in other areas of the Pact by:

- taking measures that encourage young people's mobility, in particular by removing existing obstacles, taking into account the important role that mobility plays in developing young people's potential and in bringing the European Union closer to young people;
- allowing young parents to reconcile work and family life, in particular by expanding the child care network and developing innovative forms of work organisation.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL to

23. encourage further progress with regard to measures for young people by implementing the European Pact for Youth in the Lisbon strategy;
24. invite the Member States to reinforce links between policies on education, training, employment, social inclusion and mobility, so as to develop more effective cross-sectoral strategies for young people;
25. invite the Member States, when preparing their national reform programmes, and the Commission, in its Annual Progress Report, to report more systematically and more visibly on the Pact within the Lisbon strategy, in order to facilitate monitoring of the progress made;
26. reiterate its request to the Commission and the Member States to involve young people and youth organisations at all levels in the implementation of the European Pact for Youth."

These conclusions will serve as a contribution from the (Youth) Council to the Spring European Council.

– *Other business*

The Council was briefed on the following items:

- a) Communication from the Commission "Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning"
 - presentation by the Commission
- b) Communication from the Commission "Launching a knowledge flagship: the European Institute of Technology"
 - presentation by the Commission
- c) EuroSkills Competition
 - information from the NL delegation and the Commission

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

TRANSPORT

Technical requirements for inland waterway vessels*

The Council adopted a Common Position with a view to the adoption of a Directive laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels and repealing Directive 82/174/EEC (13274/05+6207/06 ADD1).

The objective of the Directive is to align the Community technical requirements on the advanced standards governing navigation on the Rhine with a view to establishing a single scheme for the entire network of European waterways.

Work in the Council bodies on the Directive - the proposal for which was submitted in December 1997 - remained at a standstill for a long time because of the issue of the possibility of admitting craft with Community certificates to navigation on the Rhine. Whereas such a possibility was previously excluded under the rules established by the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR), this situation changed when the CCNR adopted a modification of the Mannheim Act (Additional Protocol 7, in force since December 2004), introducing a legal basis for navigation on the Rhine with certificates delivered by bodies other than the CCNR. The Directive provides for the equivalence of Community inland navigation certificates with certificates issued by the CCNR.

The Directive is addressed to the 13 Member States which have inland waterways.

FISHERIES

Sole stocks *

The Council adopted a Regulation establishing a multi-annual plan for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole in the Bay of Biscay, following a political agreement reached at the Council meeting on 20-22 December 2005 (5696/06, 5697/06 ADD1).

The objective of the plan is to bring the spawning stock biomass of Bay of Biscay sole above the precautionary level of 13 000 tonnes in 2008 by gradually reducing the fishing mortality rate on the stock. After this date the Council will decide on a long-term target fishing mortality rate and a rate of reduction in the fishing mortality rate. Each year the Council will decide on a total allowable catch (TAC) for the following year for Bay of Biscay sole.

In order to limit fishing effort, measured as the sum of the engine power in kilowatt and the number of days fishing in the area, the Regulation provides for: either a special sole fishing permit in the Bay of Biscay which will be granted to vessels fishing more than 2 000 kg of sole by the Member States, or for a Member State whose quota for sole in this area is less than 10% of the TAC, the level of fishing effort must not exceed the reference level of the fishing effort in 2006.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Optical radiation *

The Council adopted a Directive on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to risks arising from physical agents (artificial optical radiation), following an agreement reached with the European Parliament in the Conciliation Committee (*PE-CONS 3668/3/05 COR 1, 5775/06 ADD*).

The Directive lays down minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from artificial optical radiation with the objective of achieving harmonisation of control regimes between Member States. It seeks to do so by relying upon guidelines for restrictions on exposure that have been produced by the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection. These scientifically-based guidelines are designed to prevent the acute and long-term effects on the eyes and the skin that can occur at extremely high levels of exposure.

The Directive imposes a range of responsibilities on employers, including requirements to assess risk, reduce exposure, undertake health surveillance and provide information and training to workers. It applies, inter alia, to workers working with lasers and electrical welding equipment, those in the steel and glass industries and those working in artificial tanning businesses.

For more details see press release 15486/05.