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(Information)

COUNCIL

COUNCIL OPINION

of 14 February 2002

concerning education and training issues in the proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for 2002

(2002/C 47/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Whereas:

(1) The Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 acknowledged the important role played by the education and training sector in living and working in the knowledge society and that the Council (Education) should contribute to the Luxembourg and Cardiff processes by reflecting on the concrete future objectives of education systems.

(2) The Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001 confirmed that role and requested the Council and the Commission to present a joint report to the spring 2002 European Council containing a detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems.

(3) The Council (Education) adopted a favourable opinion on 9 November 2000 on the proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2001, where lifelong learning is a horizontal objective.

(4) The Council Resolution of 13 July 2001 on the role of education and training in employment related policies [1] invited the Commission and the Member States, *inter alia*, to ensure that the Council (Education) is actively involved in the examination of the Commission's proposal for employment guidelines and the identification of policy relevant and comparable indicators with a view to a timely contribution to the preparation of the guidelines and relevant areas dealing with education and training as well as within a lifelong learning perspective.

RECALLS that the role of education and training policies in support of employment is recognised within the current structure of the employment guidelines in four pillars — employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities. The introduction in 2000 into the employment guidelines for 2001 of the 'horizontal objective on lifelong learning' was an important step towards a greater coherence and understanding of this role. However, a better representation of education and training policies should be pursued;

STRESSES the fact that lifelong learning, which has already become a key issue (in education and training) at Member State and Community level, has become a clear priority in national employment policies;

NOTES that lifelong learning is still dispersed among several guidelines and pillars and that a new horizontal objective on quality in work has been added to the employment guidelines (building on the Commission Communication 'Employment and social policies: framework for investing in quality') covering skills and lifelong learning. While welcoming this objective it would be helpful if the more distinctive features in relation to lifelong learning could be indicated;

WELCOMES the fact that there has been increased involvement of those responsible for education and training in the different phases of implementation of the European employment strategy;

EMPHASISES that through its own processes and instruments, the Council will increasingly contribute to the Lisbon goals and the Luxembourg process as well as to the successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society.

In this context, there is a need to strengthen cooperation and synergy between the different and complementary processes and initiatives, in particular the follow-up of the report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems, the follow-up of the Commission's Memorandum on lifelong learning and the action plan on *e*Learning;

NOTES that the Member States and the Commission are currently carrying out an impact evaluation of the European employment strategy which will be reflected in the employment Guidelines 2003. In this context, it is important that the Council and the authorities responsible for education and training be closely associated in this evaluation process, at national and European level, in view of a more effective involvement in the evaluation before political conclusions are drawn.

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[1] OJ C 204, 20.7.2001, p. 1.