



Final Communique of the VII Conference of European Ministers of Education (Nicosia, 27-28 June 2003)

28.06.2003

1. The Nicosia Conference of European Ministers of Education was co-organised under the Greek Presidency of the EU by the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, the European Commission and the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus.
2. It follows previous meetings in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, Riga and Bratislava, organised as part of the commonly agreed pre-accession strategy and aiming at strengthening the informal political dialogue between Ministers from the European Union and the acceding countries, as well as the EFTA/EEA countries and the countries of South-East Europe. Representatives of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and OECD also attended the meeting.
3. The Conference theme was "Quality in Education and active citizenship" and addressed European political cooperation in this field which is one of the common objectives of education and training systems in Europe and the main area of interest of all actors involved in education and training.
4. The Greek Minister of Education Mr Petros Efthymiou and the European Commissioner Mrs Viviane Reding, responsible for education and training matters, recalled that the Lisbon process, initiated by the European Council in the spring of 2000, set a new strategic objective for the European Union for the next decade, namely to become 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. In order to achieve this objective, it has been agreed to implement a comprehensive strategy with regard to education and training systems, according to the mandate of Lisbon and Stockholm European Councils.
5. A report on concrete future objectives for education and training systems was adopted in spring 2001 setting out the goals to be pursued, timetable and methodology for implementation and a detailed work programme was adopted on 14 February 2002. The

Barcelona European Council in March 2002 endorsed this detailed programme and requested that the European education and training systems become, by 2010, a world reference. Thus the Council and the Commission underlined their determination to provide a comprehensive response to the challenges of the knowledge society, globalisation and the enlargement of the EU and agreed the participation of acceding Countries in this process.

6. Three strategic objectives for the education and training systems have been fixed (improved quality, facilitation of universal access and opening-up the systems to the wider world) entailing thirteen associated objectives covering important issues such as basic skills, foreign languages, ICT in education, mobility, teacher training, attractiveness of learning, active citizenship. An interim report on work progress towards the common future objectives is under preparation to be submitted to the Spring European Council of 2004.

7. In the Education Council of May 2003, European Benchmarks were adopted in five fields: early school leavers, graduates in maths, science and technology, completion of upper secondary education, low- achievers in reading literacy and, finally, participation in life-long learning.

8. Two workshops were organized in the framework of the Nicosia Conference providing an opportunity for an exchange of good practices. Following these discussions, the Ministers agreed on the crucial role of the school in preparing citizens to be active in local, national and European contexts and open to the world. This preparation is aimed at both participation of European citizens and society and the development of European identity based on common values and common cultural traditions. Ministers agreed also on the need to provide teachers with competences required to meet these challenges and on the importance of initial and particularly in-service teacher education in this connection.

9. The Ministers welcome the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process / Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for the South Eastern Europe and its strategy for future activities. They also welcome the joint memorandum of understanding of the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe and its Action Plan which is expected to strengthen the cooperation with regard to ongoing reform processes of the education systems.

10. Ministers note that the accession of a further ten Member States to the European Union will extend the possibilities for dialogue between them in that context. They agreed to explore new ways of extending this dialogue to the other countries represented in this Conference.

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