

VI CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS OF EDUCATION

“EDUCATION IN THE NEW MILLENIUM”

Bratislava, Slovak Republic 16-18 June 2002

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

1. The Bratislava Conference of European Ministers of Education was co-organised under the Spanish Presidency of the EU by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, the European Commission and the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic.
2. It follows previous meetings in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest and Riga, 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 candidate 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, OECD and UNESCO also attended the meeting.
3. Under the heading “Education in the New Millenium”, the Conference addressed European political cooperation on the future objectives of education and training systems in Europe.
4. The Spanish Minister of Education Mrs del Castillo and the European Commissioner Mrs Reding, responsible for education and training matters, recalled that the Lisbon process, opened by the European Council in the spring of 2000, set a new strategic objective for the European Union for the next decade, namely that its economy, based in knowledge, be transformed into “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 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. On 14 February 2002 the Education Council adopted the detailed programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems to 2010 and the programme was endorsed by the Barcelona European Council in March 2002.

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.

6. Following the request of the European Council, arrangements for the effective participation of Candidate Countries in the process concerning the future objectives of education and training systems were agreed by the Commission and the Council. The Bratislava Conference aimed to promote this participation.
7. 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
8. Two workshops were organised in the framework of the Bratislava Conference on the following topics:

Supporting quality in education: Ministers agreed that quality was measured through the level of outcomes, and through effective access for everyone at all stages of education and training in a lifelong learning perspective. Education systems should be flexible enough to allow individuals to build on their strengths, developing skills for employability, personal skills and societal values. This can be achieved by promoting better career planning and professional development for teachers as well as more responsibility at school level. Quality assurance systems, which respect local and national situations, must be developed, in order to allow comparison by exchange of good practice and mutual understanding at European level.

Access and attractiveness of learning: lifelong learning addresses a wide spectrum of learning opportunities for which the State has an outstanding responsibility, which must also involve many other actors, such as the social partners, families, civil society and the individuals themselves. With this aim, quality standards should be established at national level and exchange of experiences and good practices should be promoted at European level. Partnerships and agreements between the actors concerned are fundamental for establishing bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning including, if appropriate, skills and knowledge gained in the workplace in order to make lifelong learning attractive for all citizens.

9. The Commission presented the European Report on quality indicators of lifelong learning, which was prepared in close cooperation with national experts representing all countries participating in the Conference. The Ministers welcomed the European report and stressed the important contribution the report makes to enhancing quality of lifelong learning in Europe. It will be followed up in the context of the detailed work program of the objectives of education and training systems.
10. The Ministers recalled the importance of education of good quality for all human beings and stressed that the European Union, the Member States, the Candidate Countries, the EFTA/EEA countries and the countries of South-East-Europe have a responsibility together with all participants in the international Conference in Dakar, April 2000, to support the Education for All-process to achieve the Dakar goals on Education for All.

The Ministers also emphasised that the importance of education for sustainable development will be underlined at the Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002.

11. The Ministers welcome the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process/Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and its strategy for future activities, which contributes to the implementation of the Objectives of Education and training, especially in terms of establishing a more structured process on perspectives for mid to long-term cooperation between the countries of the European Union et the Accession/Stabilisation/Association Process countries The Ministers see this as a further step for integrating South East European countries into the European area of Education.
12. The Ministers strongly supported the idea of enhanced cooperation at European level and reaffirmed the importance of the European Conferences for the exchange of experiences and information at policy-making level. The Greek and Cypriot Ministers of Education announced their willingness to host the next European Conference to take place in Cyprus during the Greek Presidency of European Union in the first semester of 2003.
