

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARINGS

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER DESIGNATE

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(Education, training, culture and multilingualism)

Part B – Specific questions

A. General questions

- 1. At present, under the open method of coordination, the Parliament has only a consultative role in the implementation of those aspects of the Lisbon process which relate to education and training systems. At the same time, however, resources from the Community budget are committed to supporting the 'concrete future objectives' process. How will you ensure that the Parliament is more closely involved in this process?***

The open method of coordination applies in fields in which the powers of the Union and its Institutions are limited: the method is designed, as the Lisbon conclusions put it, to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies, mainly through exchange of information and best practice.

If resources from the Community budget are to be used to support this process, the budgetary authority, and thus the European Parliament, will of course be fully involved under normal budgetary procedures.

Parliament should also be involved in substantive policy issues dealt with under the method. I am committed to keep Parliament fully informed about any significant initiatives taken in the areas under my responsibility. I will be available for regular exchanges of views, in particular with the relevant Committees, and will be very attentive to reports and opinions presented by Parliament.

- 2. What do you believe should be the annual ceiling on the budget of the European Communities under the next (2007-2013) Financial Perspective?***

Budgetary discipline is necessary and unavoidable both at the national and the European level. But discipline does not necessarily mean spending less – it means in particular spending wisely and efficiently. And for European spending it means spending on added value, i.e. actions which can be done only, or better, at the European level.

That is true for strengthening competitiveness of the Union, taking into account the objectives set in Lisbon, increasing cohesion, education and training in support of growth and employment, better management and protection of natural resources, strengthening European citizenship; and enhancing the EU position as a global player. And all this needs to be done for a unprecedentedly enlarged EU.

I therefore believe that the Commission's proposal for a ceiling of 1.24% is the right one. This allows allocating substantially increased means to newly proposed EU programmes in my areas of responsibility. Such an increase is fully justified considering the importance of these programmes for increasing the competitiveness of the Union, for ensuring the cohesion of our societies, the development of the personal potential of our citizens and their attachment to, and involvement in European integration.

B. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

CULTURE

3. *What is Europe doing to improve integration with different cultures from other continents, with which there has historically been a valuable relationship, particularly given the fact that immigrants in Europe today are giving these cultures a presence?*

We are not starting from scratch as is illustrated by the many important cooperation initiatives directed towards many countries, both in the industrialized and the developing world. Programmes like Meda, Tempus, the new Erasmus Mundus programme, growing education cooperation with countries like the USA, Canada, China, Australia, as well as the emphasis that has been put on education and culture projects in development assistance policies in general are just a few examples.

Especially after the September 11 disaster there is an urgent need to invest more in the intercultural dialogue. I support initiatives like the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, as well as the involvement of intellectuals and artists in awareness-raising and concept-development around this topic. The Commission has played an active role, and I will pursue this further. The next challenge is to extend this process to a much wider public, not only through conferences but also through attractive cultural events in our Member states as well as in partner countries. I want to work towards this objective with my colleagues in charge of external relations, with public authorities and cultural institutions, as well as with organisations like the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Intercultural dialogue is also increasingly important within the EU as illustrated by the public debate about immigration, inclusion, tolerance and mutual understanding. The Education and Culture programmes must actively contribute to intercultural dialogue projects. The successor programme for Culture, from 2007, must make intercultural dialogue one of the main strands of action, next to the mobility of artists and their work. I am also committed to promoting language learning as an instrument for intercultural dialogue, alongside respect for regional and minority languages – in line with the Action Plan *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity*.

4. How will you contribute to ensuring that Article 151(4) of the Treaty, which is aimed at incorporating cultural aspects into EU policies, will be taken into consideration?

Article 151 (4) EC is an important Treaty provision that has in the past led to concrete results as illustrated by Commission decisions concerning state aids to the cinema sector or regarding book prices, in which the cultural dimension is fully taken into account. I will place great emphasis on the application of this Article whenever policy decisions, in any area, involve a cultural dimension. Moreover, I will ensure continued monitoring of the cultural impact in other policy areas, along the lines of the recent Commission report collecting information and data on the use of structural funds in the cultural sector from 1994 to 1999.

I will take all the appropriate, necessary and possible steps to support successful application of article 151(4). First, the Directorate-General for Education and Culture will remain actively involved as a guardian of this article in any relevant debate within and outside the Commission. Second, I will keep the College of Commissioners aware of the crucial role that cultural issues play in the European integration process. Third, I will urge other European institutions to act in the same spirit. I expect the European Parliament and especially the Committee on Culture and Education to support this process.

5. How do you conceive the EU policy on promoting cultural diversity in an international framework (WTO, UNESCO)? How do you think Parliament could be more effectively involved in international negotiations on cultural diversity?

Cultural goods and services require specific attention because they can be closely related to cultural identity. This is being recognized increasingly, including in the WTO. But this is not enough. Good global governance must include a clear commitment to preserve and promote cultural diversity worldwide. I therefore support the launch of negotiations within UNESCO on a Convention for the protection of the diversity of cultural content and artistic expressions in line with the Commission's 2003 Communication "Towards an international instrument on cultural diversity".

Negotiations are expected to begin soon at intergovernmental level in UNESCO. It is important that the EU and the Member States confirm their commitments towards cultural diversity, including in this international context. A common approach is necessary to contribute effectively to the development of a world-wide strategy for the safeguarding and promotion of cultural diversity.

To the extent that Community policies and instruments are concerned with the operative part of the preliminary draft of UNESCO Convention, it is for the Community to negotiate its participation in the Convention in order to preserve its *acquis* and competences and to put forward its interests. This is the purpose of the recent Commission recommendation to the Council in order to be authorized to participate, on behalf of the Community, in the UNESCO negotiation (as it was encouraged to do by the European Parliament).

I thank the European Parliament for its strong support for this UNESCO initiative, in particular, last January, through the own-initiative Report of Mrs Prets on cultural diversity. The Parliament has clearly a major role to play in voicing the European view. I will continue to inform the European Parliament about the developments in UNESCO and look forward to benefiting from your further contributions.

6. **How do you see the future of the Community action entitled 'European Capital of Culture'?**

I believe that it is of the utmost importance that the Parliament and the Council rapidly adopt the Commission proposal allowing the new Member States to participate as soon as possible in this action on an equal footing with the other 15 Member States.

The Commission proposed to modify the Decision in November 2003, with the sole purpose of rapidly enabling the new Member States to nominate a city to be European Capital of Culture each year, from 2009 until 2019. The list for the 10 new Member States has been agreed between them. The Council adopted its common position last May. This corresponds largely to the Commission's proposal and enjoys unanimity among the Member States.

I am aware that Parliament has raised questions about possible improvements to the content and the procedure of the European Capitals of Culture scheme. I will report back to Parliament on these matters as soon as possible on the basis of different inputs, and particularly the results of a study which has just been finalised concerning the outputs of the Capitals designated for the years 1995-2004. But these wider questions should not be an obstacle to giving the new Member states as soon as possible a legal basis for starting the preparations, which are long by definition, for their participation in the scheme.

EDUCATION

7. **What are your objectives for the future education and training framework programme?**

Most importantly, there should be rapid agreement on the newly proposed integrated Lifelong Learning programme. It should be up and running as from 1 January 2007, and this requires a decision a year earlier to allow for orderly preparation. The overall policy objective of the recently proposed integrated programme is to contribute, through lifelong learning, to the development of the EU as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The new programme will contribute to the fulfilment of the goals set by the Lisbon European Council for 2010: increasing the quality of education and training in Europe; improving access to lifelong learning and opening up the education and training systems to the wider world.

In particular, the programme aims to allow for a process of mutual learning between all levels in Member States. Experience shows that enabling the mobility of students, trainees, adult learners, teachers, trainers, and academics is crucial. As well as enabling the individual concerned to acquire practical knowledge and language skills, it facilitates the mobility of practices and ideas, the direct transfer of new approaches and skills and the promotion of networks of institutions co-operating at the European level, thus contributing to the European identity. Indeed, many Erasmus students say that their exchange has been the most significant experience in their lives.

The new programme will build upon past experience, while aiming at substantially increasing the numbers of citizens benefiting from mobility for learning purposes, by aiming for **one pupil in 20** in the Union to take part in **Comenius**; by aiming for the target of **3 million students** since the establishment of **Erasmus** by 2011; by aiming for **150 000 training placements** each year under **Leonardo da Vinci** in 2013; by aiming for **25 000 adults** each year to benefit from mobility under **Grundtvig** in 2013.

8. What further action do you believe the Commission can and should take to overcome obstacles to the mutual recognition of educational diplomas ?

Insufficient recognition of qualifications is a major barrier to the development of a European labour market and to the right of citizens to move throughout Europe to learn and work. Apart from the internal market directives for regulated professions, there is no basis for binding Community instruments, and responsibility lies with Member States.

Recognition is undermined by the lack of knowledge and trust between Member States concerning their respective education and training systems. However, in recent years, substantial progress has been made through the development of non-binding European instruments by the Commission and through the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. These aim to improve the transparency of diplomas and qualifications – e.g. the new EuroPass which will be operational in early 2005 – and to enhance quality assurance through agreed standards, procedures and guidelines. The Commission has promoted the recognition of degrees and periods of study abroad, notably through the European Credit Transfer System between Higher Education institutions. I will pursue these efforts and work towards a similar system of credit transfer for Vocational Education and Training.

Further action is required to establish a genuine European area of education and training and to overcome obstacles to mutual recognition. In particular, we should develop an overall European Qualifications Framework for the recognition of qualifications, diplomas and competencies based on common reference levels and certification principles and on the quality assurance instruments. I will present the basis for such a framework. Of course, these initiatives, once agreed at the European level, will only have a real impact on citizens if fully implemented by Member States.

YOUTH

9. **What are your priority areas for action in the field of youth policy? How would you evaluate the current Community action programme YOUTH (2000-2006)? Around which objectives would you construct the new YOUTH programme?**

I will actively pursue the implementation of the "YOUTH" programme, and the development of the "Framework of European cooperation in the youth field". The latter is a very recent initiative, adopted by the Council in June 2002, following the presentation of the White Paper on youth. It is a tool for developing cooperation and exchange of best practices among Member States, stimulating discussion and debate, particularly to the field of citizenship. The support of the European Parliament has been crucial for the development of this area of policy cooperation. I will closely associate Parliament with our initiatives in this field.

The evaluation report covering the first 4 years of implementation the current YOUTH programme, presented by the Commission last March, highlights its important added value. It gives young people a real opportunity to participate in projects of European dimension. The accompanying set of recommendations has been taken into account in the recent Commission proposal for the "YOUTH IN ACTION" programme¹ in order to add a new objective (Youth citizenship) and to put even more emphasis on solidarity, mutual understanding and support for youth activities. I support this new approach which is in line with the "Framework of European cooperation in the youth field".

SPORTS

10. **Now that the end of the European Year of Education through Sport is approaching, what role, if any, do you think the European Commission should play in support for sporting activities in Europe? What budget will be earmarked for education through sport, bearing in mind that the EUR 12.1 million already set aside for this purpose was not sufficient for the 15 Member States that existed before 1 May?**

I will report the results of the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES 2004) to the European Parliament by December 2005. But already today, I can say that the Year has been a great success as illustrated by the 1600 projects proposed from all 28 participating countries, from which 170 were selected. Everywhere in Europe, schools, sporting clubs, federations and public bodies actively work together to pass on values like fair play, tolerance, team working, respect of the rules and of the opponent, to our young people via the sporting activities.

It is therefore obvious for me that sport can and should be used for further enhancing these values. The reference to sport in the draft constitutional treaty (Article III-282) provides, for the very first time, a legal basis for EU action in the field of sport. I will launch work on the drafting of the appropriate policy in consultation with all concerned parties to ensure quality action for the benefit of our European citizens. Adoption and implementation of the policy and earmarking the necessary funding will obviously depend on ratification of the Treaty and on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 discussions. Subject to positive outcomes of those processes, support measures based on the new Treaty article could start by 2008/2009.

Needless to say, I will keep in close touch with Parliament in all phases of the development and the implementation of the policy.

11. How does the Commission intend to deal with the monopoly of 'doping control' laboratories at a time when the scourge of our age (i.e. the use of prohibited substances) is threatening the youth of Europe and of the whole world? Has an amount been calculated for economic assistance for the creation of similar centres in the 25 Member States, in order to provide closer supervision? How do you think the Commission could contribute to a more healthy sports environment for athletes with a view to freeing it from drug-taking ?

As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, the draft Constitutional Treaty contains an article (n° III – 282) on Education, Youth and Sport. The new reference to sport is, in my view, a welcome innovation. It entrusts the Union with the task of contributing to the promotion of European sporting issues, including, and I quote, “by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially young sportsmen and sportswomen”. If and when the Constitution is ratified, this will enable the Commission to support the Member States’ fight against doping, through incentive actions. Clearly the existence of an efficient network of laboratories should be an element of any effective action against doping in sport. Such activities must, of course, be carried out in conformity with community law, including competition law. As to budgetary aspects, and pending the adoption of the draft Constitution, the Commission will carry out a wide consultation on the possible content and cost of any incentive actions it may propose in implementation of the new Article (III – 282).

I will not develop the health aspects of doping, which falls under the remit of other Commissioners; however drug prevention and tackling the drug use by young people are key priorities within the Public Health Programme (2003-2008) which addresses notably major health determinants with the aim of reducing the burden of disease and promoting the health of the general population. One of the objectives of this programme is to promote and stimulate Member States’ efforts in this field, inter alia, by developing innovative projects which will stand as examples of effective practice. As an example, a project on doping and health is on the 2004 reserve list for funding under that programme.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

12. Comment comptez-vous promouvoir les meilleures pratiques dans le domaine de la formation professionnelle?

The development of good practice in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is promoted through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, the Cedefop agency and by means of enhanced cooperation under the Copenhagen process.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme finances collaborative transnational projects which, on the one hand, develop innovation and good practice at the European level and, on the other, transfer innovation between participating countries. The results of innovative projects are systematically “valorised” (exploited), disseminated and taken up in the improvement of national training systems, partially funded by the European Social Fund. The Leonardo da Vinci programme also promotes mutual sharing of knowledge and experience by means of transnational networks and partnerships.

The Cedefop agency in Thessaloniki acts as a centre of expertise which collects and disseminates innovation, knowledge and good practice resulting from EU programmes, Member States systems and activities of the social partners. The means employed include its website, networks, study visits and a database being developed on good examples of policy and practice.

The identification and exchange of good practice is also an important means of enhancing European cooperation in VET under the Copenhagen Process, as part of the Education and Training 2010 programme. This also involves the use of peer review and networking between national organisations.

The results of these activities are presented, discussed and disseminated at European conferences on the development of VET, such as the planned Dutch Presidency conference to be held in Maastricht on 15 December 2004.

13. Quelles relations éventuelles conviendrait-il d'établir pour renforcer le rôle de la Stratégie européenne pour l'emploi, du Fonds social européen et du programme Leonardo dans la promotion de la formation professionnelle et de l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie dans l'Union européenne?

The 2002 Copenhagen declaration on enhanced cooperation in the field of vocational education and training provides an overall policy framework for the improvement of Member States' vocational education and training systems and the achievement of a genuine European labour market, in accordance with the Lisbon objectives.

The European Employment Strategy gives high priority to these objectives and to increasing and improving investment in human capital. These two political instruments strongly support

each other and the Commission ensures full coherence and complementarity between them. They are supported and implemented by two complementary funding programmes, the European Social Fund (ESF) and Leonardo da Vinci (LdV).

The ESF funds national and regional employment strategies including training, whereas LdV supports the development and transfer of innovation through trans-national collaborative projects and the mobility of trainees and trainers. The ESF supports the mainstreaming of the results of LdV projects as well as of national and regional initiatives promoting innovation into national systems.

The Commission has put in place an interservice group on vocational education and training which brings together all relevant Commission services in order to coordinate policy and programmes in the most effective way. It has also put in place mechanisms to prevent double funding and increase complementarity in relation to transnational ESF measures, such as the Equal initiative, particularly by increased responsibility on national authorities. The implementation of the ESF has recently been strengthened with the launch of a Mutual Learning programme which will focus on making lifelong learning a reality in the second half of 2005.

The proposals for the future ESF and lifelong learning programmes have been drawn up to reinforce this complementarity. The ESF will no longer have a distinct transnational programme such as Equal and will ensure that future investments are more closely in accordance with the overall objectives agreed at the European level in the fields of employment, education and training.