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(Information)

COUNCIL

Council conclusions on the European Indicator of Language Competence

(2006/C 172/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

having regard to:

- the strategic goal set for the European Union by the Lisbon European Council of 23-24 March 2000 and reaffirmed by the Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001 *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;*
- the mandate from the Lisbon European Council to the Education Council *to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity* ⁽¹⁾;
- the Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning ⁽²⁾ which emphasised, amongst other things, that:
 - *the knowledge of languages is one of the basic skills which each citizen needs to acquire in order to take part effectively in the European knowledge society and therefore facilitates both integration into society and social cohesion;* and that
 - all European languages are equal in value and dignity from the cultural point of view and form an integral part of European culture and civilisation,

and which invited the Member States to set up systems of validation of competence in language knowledge based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages developed by the Council of Europe;

- the Barcelona European Council conclusions of 15-16 March 2002 ⁽³⁾, which:
 - endorsed the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems ⁽⁴⁾,
 - called for further action to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age; and
 - called for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator in 2003;
- the Council conclusions on new indicators in the fields of education and training of May 2005 ⁽⁵⁾
- the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council entitled *The European Indicator of Language Competence* ⁽⁶⁾;
- the draft recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁷⁾, which defines communication in a foreign language as a key competence;
- the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* ⁽⁸⁾,

⁽¹⁾ Doc. SN 100/1/00 REV 1, paragraph 27.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 50, 23.2.2002, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ SN 100/1/02 REV 1.

⁽⁴⁾ adopted by the Education Council on 14 February 2002 (OJ C 142, 14.6.2002, p. 1).

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 141, 10.6.2005, p. 7.

⁽⁶⁾ doc. 11704/05 - COM (2005) 356 final.

⁽⁷⁾ doc. 13425/05 - COM (2005) 548 final.

⁽⁸⁾ doc. 14908/05 - COM (2005) 596 final.

REAFFIRMS that

- foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union economy;
- periodic monitoring of performance through the use of indicators and benchmarks is an essential part of the Lisbon process, allowing good practice to be identified with a view to providing strategic guidance and steering for both short and long term measures of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme;

RECOGNISES that

- measures are needed to remedy the current absence of reliable comparative data on the outcomes of foreign language teaching and learning;
- such measures must be based upon the gathering of data through objective tests of language skills, developed and administered in such a way as to ensure the reliability, accuracy and validity of those data;
- such data have the potential to help identify and share good practice in language education policies and language teaching methods through an enhanced exchange of information and experience;
- Member States need a clearer picture of the practical and financial arrangements they will each need to make in order to implement the European Indicator of Language Competence;

STRESSES that

- the development of the Indicator should fully respect the responsibility of Member States for the organisation of their education systems and should not impose undue administrative or financial burdens on the organisation and institutions concerned;
- the method for data-gathering should take account of previous work in the field at international, Union and Member State level, and be devised and implemented in a cost-effective manner;
- the European Indicator of Language Competence shall be put in place as soon as possible, in accordance with the following terms of reference:
 - data should be gathered on competences in first and second foreign languages:

- via a common suite of tests administered to a representative sample of the target population in each Member State;

- from a representative sample of pupils in education and training at the end of ISCED level 2;

- where a second foreign language is not taught before the end of ISCED 2, Member States may, in the first round of data-gathering, choose to gather data for the second foreign language from pupils at the level of ISCED 3;

- for those languages for which there exists a suitable representative sample of learners in a given Member State;

- test scores should be based on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages ⁽¹⁾;

- 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;

- Member States shall themselves determine which of those official languages are to be tested;

- the Indicator should assess competence in the four productive and receptive skills; but for practical reasons it would be advisable, in the first round of data-gathering, for tests to be made available in the three language skills which may be assessed most readily (i.e. listening comprehension, reading comprehension and writing);

- the testing methodology should be made available to those Member States who wish to use it for their own development of tests in other languages;

- appropriate contextual information to help assess underlying factors should also be gathered;

⁽¹⁾ 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment', as developed by the Council of Europe.

INVITES the Commission to:

- set up, at the earliest opportunity, an Advisory Board (the 'EILC Advisory Board') composed of a representative of each Member State and one representative of the Council of Europe, whose mandate shall be to advise the Commission on technical matters, such as:
 - the specification of the tender for the creation of the testing instruments;
 - the assessment of the work of the contractor;
 - the appropriate arrangements, standards and technical protocols for data-gathering activities in the Member States, taking into consideration the need to prevent undue administrative and financial burdens for the Member States;
- in order to assist Member States to define the organisational and resource implications for them, give this Board the initial task of bringing forward a timetable for the work

and a more detailed description of the construction and administration of the tests, including:

- sample size;
- preferred testing method, and
- preferred arrangements for administering the tests, taking the possibilities of e-testing into account;
- the minimum sample size that should determine whether a test for a particular language shall be made available to Member States;
- report back in writing to the Council by the end of 2006 on the progress of work and, if appropriate, on any issues outstanding;

INVITES Member States to:

- take all necessary steps to carry forward the process of establishing the EILC.
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