

17.8. The Committee welcomes the gradual move from project financing to programme financing. This new system has the potential to solve many problems: in the preparation and finalization of measures, in the involvement of the various tiers of authority, in the participation of the two sides of industry, in additionality, and in the coordination of the various policies.

The Community programmes merit keen interest and priority treatment. It is to be hoped that their number will increase.

Done at Brussels, 13 May 1987.

17.9. The actual results of the operations carried out with ERDF support must be measurable, and must be made known to those involved and to the public at large.

This need cannot go unmet. Of course, there are many obstacles to the collection of data and preparation of conclusions, but these must be overcome.

Lastly, it is desirable that the third periodic report on the situation of the regions should provide a complete picture of the economic environment in which regional policy operates.

The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee
Alfons MARGOT

Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision adopting an action programme for the training and preparation of young people for adult and working life⁽¹⁾

(87/C 180/15)

On 3 April 1987 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 128 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Economic and Social Committee decided to appoint Mr. Nierhaus rapporteur-general to prepare work on the matter.

At its 246th plenary session (meeting of 14 May 1987) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion unanimously:

1. Introduction

1.1. Economic development in the highly-industrialized countries is characterized on the one hand by an increasing shortage of jobs for lower-skilled workers — due in the main to the deployment of new technologies — and on the other by a relative increase in the demand for well-trained and skilled specialists in all sectors of the economy. It is this, plus the related fact that human tasks (particularly those at lower-skill levels) are being replaced by electronic information and communication systems in almost all areas of administration and production, which largely contributes to the high level of structural unemployment seen today. An alarmingly high proportion of such unemployment is accounted for by youngsters on the threshold of

working life. Relatively speaking, it is still young people with a good school education and a vocational qualification who stand the best chance of finding a job. Vocational training itself, however, should not be confined to imparting purely specialist knowledge, but should also have a social content.

In cases in which general school education does not include a practical understanding of such subjects as social security, health and environmental protection, tax and money management, then ways must be found of including these within the context of vocational training.

1.2. For the rest of this Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision adopting an action programme for the training and preparation of young people for adult and working life, we have agreed on the following definition of 'training', or more precisely 'vocational training':

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 90, 4. 4. 1987, p. 4.

- Vocational training (*Berufsausbildung*) is provided after completion of general school education and is the period of initial vocational preparation for employment in a particular occupation. It can be given in private or public-sector firms but also in universities or other state or private educational establishments, and generally ends with a vocational qualification.

1.3. The European economy will not be able to compete at all on world markets unless Europe's human potential is fully exploited and well-trained specialists are turned out at all levels and in all branches of the economy and society. Accordingly there is no alternative but to pursue the following vocational-training policy objectives — which the Commission also endorses — in the Member States of the Community:

- the creation of sufficient training places to enable every young person who so desires to receive vocational training for at least one to two years,
- a constant improvement in the quality, and continuous updating of the form, content and objectives of existing training schemes, and the introduction of new training courses geared to changing needs,
- greater 'transparency' of vocational training schemes for young people through improvements in the types of information provided and comparable end-of-course examinations recognized at both national and Community level.

1.4. At Community level there is broad agreement between the two sides of industry and national governments about these European vocational-training policy objectives. A realistic examination of the problems involved, however, shows that the following factors cannot be left out of consideration:

- To move closer to achieving these objectives, substantial financial resources need to be found; but because of the size of the sums involved and the present structure of the Community, by far the greater part of the funds will have to be raised by the Member States. What makes matters worse is the fact that in some cases there are still considerable differences between the Member States in terms of the development of an efficient vocational training system. The Commission should therefore give priority to funding training activities which concern the structurally weaker regions of the Community.
- Vocational training comes under different regulatory systems in the Member States and legislation on the matter varies greatly in form and degree of detail. Vocational training is provided by many different state and private establishments, by schools, universities as well as by public and private-sector firms. Because of this, the state's powers and responsibilities for promoting and regulating vocational training are often less clear-cut than they are in the case of general school education. On the other hand the multiplicity of vocational training facilities and the range of courses on offer are a guarantee of flexibility. Flexibility, however, does

not preclude state regulation of such things as conditions of access to vocational training and comparable end-of-course examinations.

- Comparable vocational qualifications recognized throughout the Community are of vital importance if a single domestic market is to be established and workers are to enjoy freedom of movement within the Community. But, in turn comparable qualifications cannot become a reality unless the objectives and content of vocational training have first been harmonized so that the different forms and establishments of vocational training (e.g. firms, state, schools, private establishments) can compete with each other in terms of quality. Achieving this goal requires single-minded determination on the part of all those involved (national governments, the two sides of industry, Community bodies). In this connection the Community has a vitally important role to play in the fields of coordination, the dissemination of information and the promotion of appropriate initiatives to help secure Community-wide acceptance for additional vocational qualifications.

2. General comments

2.1. The Committee by and large agrees with the Commission's analysis of the present situation and shares its evaluation of vocational training requirements in the Member States of the Community. It also approves in principle the proposal for a Decision along with the planned measures appended thereto.

2.2. The Committee nevertheless also recognizes the very limited scope of the proposed measures in terms of achieving the abovementioned general objectives of a widely-recognized vocational training policy in the Member States, or the beginnings of a coordinated Community policy. The Committee would therefore appeal to the Member States to look beyond the proposal for a Decision and make every effort to seek quantitative and qualitative improvements in vocational training opportunities for young persons, harmonizing them at the highest possible level. The aim is to secure the mutual recognition of end-of-course qualifications.

2.3. We would emphasize, however, that the transition from vocational training to the labour market poses particularly difficult problems for a large number of young people. Indeed, however apparent the need for practical and high-quality vocational training, this still cannot solve the quantitative problems of the labour market (particularly that of youth unemployment) especially since the latter is also bound up with the regional economic structure in question. Vocational training policy can therefore neither dispense with, nor replace, an active labour-market policy.

2.4. The Committee would strongly emphasize that the vocational skills imparted must also be related to labour-market needs, just as they must also take particular account of regional possibilities and requirements. Success in imparting vocational skills often depends on the background against which the training takes place.

3. Specific comments

3.1. The Committee sees in the Committee to be set up under Article 3 of the draft Decision a particularly good opportunity (a) to embark on a high-level exchange of information about vocational-training systems and requirements in the Member States, (b) to develop proposals aimed at securing qualitative and quantitative harmonization, and (c) to ensure that the experiences of individual Member States can be used to the benefit of others.

3.2. With regard to the proposed 'partnership initiatives', support should be given in particular to the establishment of links between highly developed and disadvantaged regions of the Community with the aim of initiating an intensive exchange of ideas that can be put to practical use. Another aim of transfrontier partnerships might be to draw up proposals on the further development of national regulatory systems covering vocational training.

3.3. A particular problem is posed by the fact that vocational-training facilities and regulatory systems are highly developed and structured in some regions of the Community but less so in others. This means that not only funds but also information and specialist advice in particular are needed if vocational training opportunities for young people are to be further developed and gradually harmonized. The Committee therefore regards as particularly important and promising the proposal that specialist assistance be provided through the sending of teams of advisers. Success nevertheless depends on intensive planning and a clear statement of the innovative objectives of the projects.

3.4. The Committee also calls for the inclusion of activities which are likely to reduce language barriers in the Community, thereby facilitating the Community-wide use of vocational-training qualifications.

3.5. The proposed review of vocational qualifications should clearly revolve round comparisons of curricula and course content. The aim of the review should be to harmonize end-of-course vocational qualifications so that they are recognized across national borders.

3.6. In the context of the proposed action programme the Committee would generally expect to see

clear priorities for implementing the fundamental objectives of a Community-wide vocational-training policy aimed at improving and also harmonizing at the highest possible level the financial, legal and pedagogical parameters for national vocational-training policies. In the case of the proposed projects, however, it is not always clear what the priorities are — apart from the fact that there is altogether a blatant incongruity between the problems that have to be surmounted in the field of vocational training in the Community, and the actual size of the funds earmarked for Community action.

3.7. The Committee considers that one of the most effective ways of boosting employment is to promote training activities which create job opportunities in small and medium-sized enterprises and give people greater motivation to set up in business on their own.

3.8. Young women in almost all countries of the Community are particularly affected by vocational training and labour-market problems. The Committee therefore welcomes the measures to be taken by the Commission to help this particular target group. Such measures must be given high priority.

3.9. The form and content of vocational-training courses can only be of maximum effectiveness if instructors are sufficiently well qualified. The measures to improve instructor training provided for in the Commission programme are therefore strongly supported by the Committee.

3.10. The Committee considers that it makes extremely good sense to involve Cedefop in (a) providing the necessary scientific and statistical data for the Commission's activities, and (b) monitoring the comparability of vocational qualifications. The Committee also assumes that Cedefop has already accumulated experience which may be extremely important from the point of view of achieving the Commission's objectives within the framework of the action programme.

3.11. The Committee requests that it also be sent the interim and final reports referred to in Article 4 of the draft Council Decision.

Done at Brussels, 14 May 1987.

The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee
Alfons MARGOT