

estimate of the number of fatal and serious accidents resulting from work equipment and the expected

reduction of such accidents from each of the measures proposed in the Directive.

Done at Brussels, 23 November 1994.

*The President
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Carlos FERRER

Opinion on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning

(94/C 397/06)

On 14 October 1994 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty on European Union, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 10 November 1994. The Rapporteur was Mr van Dijk.

At its 320th Plenary Session (meeting of 23 November 1994), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

1. General remarks

1.1. The Economic and Social Committee approves the Commission initiative to establish 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning. This initiative is already mentioned in the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment which states: 'Investment in human resources is necessary in order to increase competitiveness, and especially in order to make it easier to assimilate and spread new technologies.'⁽¹⁾ The Committee fully endorses the decisive role of education and training in preparing Europe for its role in the 21st century.

1.2. The White Paper on European Social Policy states categorically that: 'Social policy must serve the interests of the Union as a whole and of all its people, both those in employment and those who are not.'⁽²⁾ By the same token activities during the European Year of Lifelong Learning concern not only all the citizens of the Union, but also workers in the strict sense of the term.

1.3. The Committee is astonished about the short time it has been given to submit its opinion. It seems as if the Task Force Human Resources does not take the consultation procedure seriously, as has been shown in the past.

1.3.1. Furthermore, the Committee feels that the period allowed to prepare for this European Year will be very short, given that the co-decision procedure is applicable in this case.

1.4. The Committee would stress that good continuing education and training must be founded upon sound initial training.

2. Specific remarks

2.1. The specific measures undertaken by the Commission must be coordinated closely with bodies appointed by the Member States if they are to be implemented successfully. On this point, the Committee regrets that the social partners are not included on the Advisory Committee. The ESC points out that all social forces are prime movers in a European culture of training and qualifications. This should not only be the case at European level, but also at national level.

2.2. The Commission's objectives with regard to raising awareness, publicizing and promoting this Euro-

⁽¹⁾ COM(93) 700 final — Chapter 7, p. 137.

⁽²⁾ COM(94) 333 final, p. 2.

pean Year constitute a great idea bereft of sufficient funding. Even compared with the European Year on health and safety, the budget is very modest; there is a clear risk of a loss of credibility for such an ambitious project. The Committee feels that the budget of ECU 8 million over three years should be increased.

2.2.1. ECU 8 million over three years works out at ECU 2 650 000 per annum. Divided between 12 countries, this comes to about ECU 220 000 per country per annum. With 16 states in the Union, each country would receive around ECU 165 600. By way of comparison, Germany spends more than ECU 20 billion on retraining annually.

2.3. The Committee wonders what basis will be used to distribute the fund. In earlier experiences such as the European Year on health and safety, criteria such as active population, employment in high risk sectors and SME's were used. In the current Commission document, no criteria are mentioned.

2.4. Using the media to promote lifelong learning is one of the instruments to achieve the objectives. Another

instrument might be the establishment of pilot projects. The effect of presenting the positive results of pilot projects might be higher compared with only developing a slogan and a logo.

2.5. Regarding the fact that the budget is smaller, the Committee suggests that certain priorities should be established; otherwise the impact will be negligible.

2.6. The Committee feels that investment in training is urgently needed in order to cut unemployment.

2.7. Education and training are becoming all the more important in the face of new technologies. This is true not only in industry but also in the public sector.

2.8. The Committee would like to encourage close cooperation between the various education systems (including the academic world) and business. In this way educators will get a better idea of what students need to learn in order to get a job. Businesses, for their part, will get a better idea of what education means for their sector. This does not mean that business will dictate the curricula of schools and universities.

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