

2.10 The situation greatly changed when the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS) was established in 2003 (Council Decision 2003/76/EC, 2003/77/EC, 2003/78/EC of 1 February 2003, published in OJ L 29/22, OJ L 29/25, OJ L 29/28 of 5 February 2003). At that time the remaining ECSC funds were transferred to the new fund and the Commission was charged with administering the funds and the pertaining R&D programme in line with the essential elements of the previous ECSC research programmes.

2.11 The Commission's conception of the influence of the coal and steel industry on the RFCS programme is different from that of the industry. In keeping with the provisions of Decision 2003/78/EC, COSCO and the two advisory groups CAG and SAG should be enabled to fully exercise their allocated

roles, which should not be curtailed by shifting their influence from direct evaluation only to the aspects before the call for proposals.

2.12 By means of the recent proposal to revise the technical guidelines for the RFCS programme, the Commission is seeking to adapt, wherever deemed beneficial, the formal procedures and structures to those in use in the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7) of the EU. Therefore, any harmonisation with rules and procedures of the FP should be strictly limited to areas where a genuine simplification and/or increased effectiveness can clearly be demonstrated. Whilst advantage should be taken of existing synergies between FP 7 and the RFCS where possible, the role of the RFCS as a complementary and independent programme needs to be preserved (see Part one — B).

Brussels, 13 February 2008.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council repealing Council Decision 85/368/EEC on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States of the European Community

COM(2007) 680 final — 2007/0234 (COD)

(2008/C 162/23)

On 27 November 2007 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council repealing Council Decision 85/368/EEC on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States of the European Community

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 29 January 2008. The rapporteur working without a study group was Mr Metzler.

At its 442nd plenary session, held on 13-14 February 2008 (meeting of 13 February), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 156 votes to three with five abstentions.

1. Conclusions

1.1 The Committee has thoroughly examined the reasoning of the European Commission and the European Parliament and, in particular against the backdrop of the reports and the experiences — to be confirmed by the Committee — of the work to create common career profiles, finds it to be conclusive, sound and properly argued. The Committee emphasises this in view of the creation of a new set of instruments designed to strengthen and facilitate the mobility of persons, i.e. the European Qualifications Framework.

1.2 The Committee believes that this decision helps secure better lawmaking in that it critically examines unused and unworkable rules and replaces them with better instruments.

1.3 The Committee backs Commission moves to establish a system to help people make better use of their practical experience and skills for the purposes of mobility and easier migration within the single market in services. It particularly welcomes the fact that the system is initially voluntary.

1.4 In the light of past experience, the Committee calls for action to counter the uncertainty caused by the repeal of legislation by increasing transparency and reporting on the impact of such a move, and to ensure that any confusion with Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications is avoided.

2. General comments

2.1 The Parliament and the Council have agreed to repeal Decision 85/368/EEC. Their action has been prompted by the fact that the rules in place are representative of a system for creating comparable professional qualifications that has proven difficult to implement and hard to manage in practice. Following the introduction of these rules, the European institutions identified 219 qualifications from 19 professions whose workers were most likely to move to other countries. By 1990, data on the comparability of qualifications had been published for only five of the specified sectors, covering 66 occupations.

2.2 As the Commission notes, this number, which was already too low, was subsequently reduced still further by the Member States as they made a rapid succession of changes to the professions covered by the common career paths. The centralised design meant that this resulted in the need for considerable changes. The system was not able to cope with this additional workload. Therefore, the current situation is that, in the more than 20 years since its introduction in 1985, the system has not proven effective enough in increasing mobility of workers in the cross-border provision of services or in facilitating migration in the area of personal services.

2.3 The European Community has replaced this system of harmonisation with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Thanks to its simple classification structure, this enables the Member States to categorise their own qualifications and thus to establish comparability. The body set up by the European Community to supervise the classification has the task of ensuring quality and standards. The European Community has

put in place two further instruments to complement the EQF: the Europass and the European Credit Transfer System. In addition, it has set up the Ploteus portal for the comparison of formal and informal learning. The Commission has made its activities and efforts fit in with the European Community's overall Lisbon goals to improve the single market and to cut red tape.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Committee welcomes the fact that the European Union is paying more attention to the question of facilitating migration in a bid to enhance the opportunities of the single market both for workers and in the area of personal services.

3.2 The Committee agrees that practical experience should be included in transparency comparisons. The Committee emphasises that the EQF operates at a level downstream of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, on which the Committee has issued a separate opinion, and that the two should be kept separate.

3.3 The Committee welcomes the fact that the EQF is to be implemented on a voluntary basis until 2012. This leaves time to gather practical experience and to improve acceptance of the new system through transparency and communication.

3.4 The Committee welcomes the involvement of the social partners in the work, not least because the EQF classifications may well impact on collective agreements in the medium term. The same goes for developments relating to the Blue Card.

Brussels, 13 February 2008.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS
