

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Transnational mobility for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility

(COM(2005) 450 final — 2005/0179 (COD))

(2006/C 88/06)

On 10 October 2005 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 24 January 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Czajkowski.

At its 424th plenary session on 14-15 February 2006 (meeting of 14 February), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 144 votes to none, with three abstentions:

1. Recommendations

1.1 The EESC proposes that special attention should be paid to the following areas:

- information on the programmes provided by Member States at local and national levels;
- information about equal opportunities for candidates;
- information for programme participants on insurance, international insurance agreements and the scope of insurance cover in the host country;
- clear, transparent and precise procedures for participants;
- a survey for participants, providing clear feedback and assessment by participants after taking part in the programme. This will help to ensure further improvements in quality and a rapid response by the Commission and national organisations in charge of the programme;
- special emphasis on linguistic preparation of participants, so that they can make full use of the learning plan provided to them;
- the role of mentors in assisting and looking after foreigners, in order to help them acclimatise and get used to a new situation;
- a clear definition of the range of tasks to be carried out by those in charge of the programme, in order to avoid future complaints or misunderstandings, for example between host and sender organisations;
- further coordination of mobility policy at European level (rather than at the level of individual Member States) enabling the objectives set by the Commission and the Lisbon strategy to be achieved.

2. General comments

2.1 The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Transnational mobility for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility⁽¹⁾. The mobility of people living in the European Union and the proposal to remove all obstacles to mobility between Member States will help to enhance the competitiveness of the EU, in line with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy.

2.2 It is encouraging that the Member States, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission are working on dismantling barriers to mobility in the fields of education and training⁽²⁾.

2.3 There has been mobility for the purposes of training within the EU for several decades, and this has enabled participants in various programmes to gain new experience while breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers in Europe.

2.4 The EESC notes that since 2000 the number of individuals migrating for educational purposes has tripled, thanks to educational and international exchange programmes offered to the Member States by the Commission.

2.5 The EESC also sees these programmes as an opportunity to build a European society of tolerance open to other religions, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, etc.

2.6 The EESC firmly approves of the new generation of programmes and training proposed by the Commission in 2004. Strong interest in participating in these programmes suggests that young people are indirectly contributing to the goals of the Lisbon strategy.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2005) 450 final, 23.9.2005.

⁽²⁾ European Parliament report on *Education as the cornerstone of the Lisbon process* (2004/2272(INI)), rapporteur: Guy Bono, 19.07.2005. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 14 December 2000 concerning an action plan for mobility, Nice European Council 7, 8 and 9 December 2000.

3. Specific comments

3.1 The EESC feels that the Member States should endeavour to ensure that individual programmes are coordinated at both national and local levels.

3.2 Institutions, organisations, universities, schools and mobility programme coordinators should endeavour to ensure the transparency of all procedures used to select participants. It has been observed that those in charge of selecting programme participants view international exchange programmes as a reward for achieving certain goals.

3.3 Wide-ranging information campaigns would also help by enabling access to the largest possible number of participants. Efforts should be made to ensure that as many young Europeans as possible are informed about the objectives of programmes and the opportunities which they present.

3.4 The EESC feels that Member States should guarantee to participants that the experience and qualifications which they acquire during programmes will be recognised.

3.5 Support for mobility, both for the purposes of vocational training and of volunteer programmes, is also very positive. There is no doubt that these programmes contribute to professional development and facilitate the process of employees adapting to work in an international environment.

3.6 Some of the Member States which will soon have completed implementation of the various phases of the Bologna process have already put the recommendations on

education and training of the European Quality Charter for Mobility into practice. The objectives of the Charter and the actions which it envisages should be seen in a positive light in that they aim to ensure more effective use of the Commission's proposed programmes.

3.7 It should be noted that the Commission's proposal only includes elements which could have a positive impact at European level.

3.8 A positive aspect of the Commission's proposals discussed in this document is the fact that coordination does not impose any additional financial burden, so that there are no obstacles to implementation.

3.9 Given the voluntary basis for adoption of a European Quality Charter for Mobility, there is a danger that Member States might negotiate individual conditions, which could impact on progress towards the goals of the Charter and hold up implementation at national level.

3.10 The EESC also notes that it has received feedback from civil society organisations suggesting that in some cases organisations in charge of inviting and hosting participants are not adequately prepared for implementation of the programme, which has a negative impact on participants' final assessment of the programme.

3.11 The EESC considers that the Commission should suggest a date for the Charter to enter into force, as an impetus for action by the Member States.

Brussels, 14 February 2006.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Anne-Marie SIGMUND
