



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

pursuant to the first subparagraph of Article 189 c (b) of the EC-Treaty

**Common position of the Council concerning the Council Recommendation on
European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education**

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 189c of the EC Treaty, this communication sets out the Commission's opinion on the common position adopted by the Council on 26 February 1998¹ concerning the Council Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education. The Commission's opinion takes account of the fact that on 18 November 1997 the European Parliament expressed an opinion at first reading² on the Commission's initial proposal³, following which the Commission presented an amended proposal⁴ to Parliament and the Council.

2. THE COMMISSION'S OPINION ON THE COMMON POSITION

2.1 General remarks

The Commission notes with satisfaction that the Council's common position broadly adheres to the substance and spirit of the Commission proposal. It remarks on the fact that the common position takes account of most of the amendments proposed by Parliament at first reading and accepted by the Commission.

The Commission's intention, in its original proposal, was to be very explicit as regards the concept of quality assurance and the process of quality evaluation, bearing in mind the developments taking place in this field both at Member State level and within higher education institutions. This being the first Council recommendation on cooperation in education since the entry into force of Articles 126 and 127 of the EC Treaty, and taking account of the need to promote greater transparency of European legislation, the concept of quality assurance must be explained to European citizens as a Community contribution to quality education.

The Commission's original proposal, largely based on the results of a series of pilot projects launched in 1994, highlighted the importance of collective efforts designed to encourage the players concerned to maintain their commitment in this important field. In particular, section I.B of the Commission proposal sets out in detail the principles upon which national systems of quality assessment and quality assurance should be based. The Council has moved these explanations into an annex to the Recommendation. Although the Commission would have preferred the original approach, it accepts this change, in view of the importance it attaches to the inclusion of these explanations in the final version of the Recommendation.

¹ Not yet published.

² Not yet published.

³ COM(97) 159 final of 2 May 1997.

⁴ COM(97) 707 final of 2 February 1998.

Section I

The introductory sentence to section I.A takes account of the fact that several Member States already have quality assurance systems. The changes to the three indents add a certain amount of flexibility.

The most important changes to section I.B have been discussed above (see 2.1). Otherwise, the changes to the five indents are designed to make the assessment procedure more flexible and to facilitate adaptation to the needs of each individual institution. The Commission agrees that these changes improve the text.

The slight changes made to sections I.C and I.D do not change the meaning and are therefore acceptable.

Section I.E of the common position incorporates section II.1 of the Commission's amended proposal. The task of promoting cooperation and networking between the authorities responsible for assessment is the responsibility of the Member States, while section II recommends the Commission (in close cooperation with the Member States) to encourage the cooperation referred to in I.E. The Commission regrets the omission of the specific reference to synergy with the activities of the "thematic networks" established under the SOCRATES programme. The Commission also regrets the omission of the reference to the preparation of assessment methods with a view to integrating graduates into the labour market, although several recitals (6, 7 and 9) of the common position refer to this important aspect.

Section II

With the exception of the part incorporated into section I.E, on which the Commission has given its opinion above, the spirit and content of the amended proposal are present in the common position. The Commission therefore has no further comments.

Section III

The common position partly incorporates the Commission's amended proposal, with a number of improvements, and extends the period for the presentation of reports from two to three years. The Commission has no objection to these changes. Although the second paragraph, in which the Commission is asked to submit appropriate proposals to strengthen quality assessment, is omitted from the common position, the Commission nevertheless reserves the right to present any proposals it feels will help strengthen cooperation between the Member States in this field.

3. CONCLUSION

The Commission considers that the text of the Council's common position is generally acceptable, as it retains the spirit of the Commission proposal and includes a large number of amendments adopted by Parliament at first reading.