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Schavan: “Education makes citizens fit for the future”

EU Council of Education Ministers meets for the first time under the German Presidency

The Education Ministers of the European Union (EU) came together in Brussels on Friday for their first meeting under the German Council Presidency and emphasized the significance of education policy in Europe for the success of the Lisbon reform process. The Ministers agreed that the objectives of improved competitiveness and sustainable growth approved in the Lisbon strategy could only be met if people in Europe received an excellent education. This was regarded as a decisive factor complementing the plans to spend 3% of the gross domestic product on research and development by 2010. The Ministers emphasized that Europe must become a knowledge society in order to be able to assert itself in international competition. Education plays a key role in this process.

“We must continue to work towards making our citizens fit for the future,” says Annette Schavan, Federal Minister of Education and Research and acting President of the Council of Education Ministers. According to Minister Schavan, European cooperation in the field of education has already gained momentum in recent years: “Cross-border initial and continuing vocational training, joint education programmes, a significant expansion of European mobility support, improvements in transparency and the recognition of training qualifications are signs of this development.”

Europe’s Heads of State and Government set themselves an ambitious goal at the Meeting of the European Council in March 2000. The EU is to become the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. In order to achieve this aim, the EU Council of Education Ministers agreed in 2002 on a joint “Education and Training” work programme which will continue until 2010. The central objectives in the field of education policy are: improving the quality of the national education systems and facilitating access to education for everyone.

In the meantime, the Governments in Europe have introduced a number of concrete initiatives: The newly designed EUROPASS was agreed on in 2004 with a view to making qualifications more easily comparable. In order to make the European education systems more flexible, the Governments have also initiated a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and a credit point system for vocational education and training (ECVET) — both projects are to begin in the course of the Work Programme.

The Ministers also discussed the prospects of education policy beyond 2010. They considered the expansion of early childhood education and strengthening lifelong learning as possible key areas of future European education policy. This discussion process will be continued within the framework of the forthcoming Portuguese and Slovenian EU Presidencies.