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Executive Summary

Europass: a new instrument for better recognition of qualifications and skills in the enlarged Europe

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Europass: a single framework for the recognition of qualifications in an enlarged Europe

1. European institutions are currently discussing a proposal to create a single framework for the recognition of qualifications and competences across Europe. Entitled Europass, it aims to aid mobility and transparency and will incorporate five already-existing initiatives into one coherent framework.
2. The five documents to be incorporated into Europass are: the European CV; European Language Portfolio; MobiliPass; Certificate Supplement; and Diploma Supplement. The Diploma Supplement is designed to improve recognition of qualifications, aid student mobility and contribute to the creation of a European Higher Education Area. The Berlin ministerial summit on Bologna resolved that all new graduates should receive it automatically and free of charge by 2005. The Europe Unit recently held a meeting on the Diploma Supplement in London and published a Europe note providing further information (E-04-10).
3. This initiative is a direct response to the text of the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002¹, signed by European Ministers of Education, which called for action to "increase transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments into one single framework."
4. The proposal is for a decision of the European Parliament and the Council. Discussions over the adoption of the proposal have already begun under the current Irish Presidency of the EU and are likely to be concluded during the subsequent Dutch Presidency. The official launch of Europass could therefore take place at the conference on vocational education and training in Maastricht in December 2004. For further details

¹ For the full text of this declaration see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf

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of the Europass programme see the attached European Commission press release.

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Europass : a new instrument for better recognition of qualifications and skills in the enlarged Europe

The European Commission has just adopted a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass). Conceived with an eye to lifelong learning, the proposal integrates various transparency-promoting instruments into a coherent framework, identified by the single label "Europass", which will be accessible on the Internet and to which other instruments may also be added in the future. Coordination, rationalisation and computerisation are the key concepts of the proposal, which thus makes these instruments more accessible, more user-friendly, more visible and more familiar. The urgent need to improve the transparency of qualifications and competences has become even more pressing with the impending entry of ten new Member States as emphasised by the Education Ministers of 31 European countries, the social partners and the Commission in November 2002 in the Copenhagen Declaration, to which this proposal for a decision represents a concrete response.

"With the European Union poised to expand from 15 to 25 Member States, and closer relationships being forged with the other countries of Europe, improving the transparency of qualifications and competences is essential in order to increase and improve transnational mobility and make lifelong education and training a reality", declared Viviane Reding, European Commissioner in charge of Education and Culture, at a press conference in Brussels. She went on to add: "This proposal gives concrete effect to a recommendation made in the Copenhagen Declaration and also fits in with the framework for action proposed by the Commission in its Communication: "The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms"

The Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002 explicitly called for action to "increase transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments into one single framework."

One year later, the proposal for a decision adopted by the Commission establishes this single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences, known as "Europass" a name taken over from the present Europass-Training, which this proposal amends and renames "MobiliPass".

The proposal for a decision incorporates into the Europass five existing documents which cover qualifications and competences in a lifelong-learning perspective, focusing on:

- personal and vocational skills (the European CV, which is a great success), as well as language skills (the European Language Portfolio) ;
- experience of transnational mobility (the MobiliPass, which replaces the Europass-Training, already used by more than 50 000 persons) ;
- vocational qualifications (the Certificate Supplement) and higher education diplomas (the Diploma Supplement).

However, the Europass is an open framework to which more documents may be added in the future, in particular in order to address specific sectors or skills more specifically.

Individuals looking for a job or for a change of job whether with or without a change of residence clearly need tools which will help them communicate their skills more effectively. The fact that in little more than a year the European CV has been downloaded more than half a million times from the Cedefop website alone gives an idea of the numbers of citizens concerned.

The other documents within the Europass framework also concern large numbers of citizens. The MobiliPass, for example, will be an expanded version of the present Europass-Training document and can be used to record all instances of educational mobility. In the 20 years since the Community programmes began, the number of grants awarded each year has risen from 1 000 to more than 200 000. And this is not to mention the tens of thousands of persons participating in mobility arrangements outside the Erasmus, Comenius and Leonardo da Vinci programmes. In addition, at the Conference on the Bologna Process held in Berlin in September 2003, the Education Ministers decided the Diploma Supplement should be brought into widespread use by 2005. The Diploma Supplement will in future be issued to all new higher education graduates, i.e. more than two million persons each year.

With figures at these levels, it is obvious that effective coordination will be needed both at national and at European level and that ICT systems will need to be introduced at once. To this end, the proposal for a decision provides that all implementation activities shall be rationalised and coordinated by a single body in each country, within a European network. Preparatory work on the technological platform has already begun: Cedefop (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) and the Working Group On Transparency established by the Commission in connection with the Copenhagen Process have already developed a prototype electronic Europass which will be perfected in the course of 2004.

The proposal for a decision should be adopted by the end of 2004 : discussions in the European Parliament and the Council will begin under the Irish Presidency and conclude under the Dutch Presidency. The official launch of the new Europass could therefore take place at the major conference on vocational education and training to be held in Maastricht in December 2004.

More information can be found on the following websites :

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/europass/index_en.html

http://europa.eu.int/agencies/cedefop/index_en.htm