



## COMMON STATEMENT FROM E.A.R.L.A.L.L ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN PROGRAMMES ON EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING, YOUTH AND LIFELONG LEARNING - 2003

### **Foreword**

The European Council meeting held in Lisbon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2000 launched a new strategic objective for the new decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

In achieving these goals it was agreed that the Commission needs to invest in people. In this context the Commission presented to the member states the following aims

- A sustainable increase in investment in human resources per capita
- Multipurpose local centres of learning open to all
- A new European framework for new basic skills

Lifelong learning is fundamental to the underpinning of this strategy – the foundation for a guarantee of universal and continuous access to learning in order to reach and renew new skills needed for real participation in the knowledge society.

The European Union has taken up this aim in “ A memorandum on life long learning” and in their renewal of the existing educational programmes.

The European Commission started on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November a broad consultation process on the new generation of Education Programmes with the deadline of February 28. It is important that this consultation process, which will eventually lead to the adaptation of a new generation of educational programmes, includes regional and local authorities.

### **European Association Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning**

In 2002 a network was created consisting of local and regional authorities with the intent of

- Contributing to the construction of Europe as a knowledge centre
- Contributing to the European debate on lifelong learning
- Exchanging past and present experiences
- Creating projects and new experiences
- Involving the greatest possible number of institutional and non-institutional subjects



The objective of E.A.R.L.A.L.L is to participate actively in the development of new policies, strategies and methods for Lifelong Learning among its

members. Its objective is also to establish a framework for the development of co-operation between member Regions and their regional partners, such as educational institutions, training providers, voluntary organisations, enterprises, employer associations and trade union.

At its general assembly in 2002 the association agreed on a strategy for 2003 and 2004 which included making recommendations to the European Commission on Lifelong Learning and consequently on the new generation of educational programmes.

### **The Renewal of EU educational programmes**

EARLALL has been invited to take part in the official consultation process, which is divided in to three areas.

1. The type of action to be supported through European programmes in the period after 2006
2. The geographical coverage of the programmes – which countries should be invited
3. The design and structure of the new programmes

#### **1 Type of action**

From a regional point of view it is important that the EU educational programmes support the overall development goals in the regions and are integrated with the goals and activities of the European Social Fund. Regional centres are key motors in growth and development. Creating new jobs on a local level is more cost efficient than trying to do it on a national level. The EU educational programmes need to better take into consideration the regional perspective of education policies. In order to highlight the regional dimension of education and innovation we would therefore ask for a new Community initiative, which would focus on “Knowledge based regions”. Future co-operation models on knowledge based regions may prove to be useful for the new member countries as well as for third countries.

There is a limit to how much the education programmes can expand and grow though they should not be limited. Just as important as it is that many people can take part in the programmes is the quality aspect of the programmes and the projects themselves. At this stage in the process it would be vital to add more resources for an active valorisation. It is in the interest of the European taxpayers as much as it is in the interest of the education sector that money is spent wisely and that we maintain a high standard and quality of projects. Further valorisation could prove to be useful when it comes to guaranteeing a good quality of the projects. There may therefore be a need of a special budgetline for this action.



Apart from these two comments EARLALL is generally speaking quite satisfied with the content of the existing programmes. It is important to keep the combination of top level research and the fight against social exclusion as pointed out at the Lisbon summit in 2000. Especially the Grundtvig programme has got the potential of becoming an important tool in advancing life long learning, active citizenship and participatory democracy in the European union.

## **2 Geographical coverage**

The coming enlargement of the European Union will pose a real challenge for the solidarity of the citizens of the EU. It is important that we do our utmost so that the new member countries can integrate smoothly in to the Union. This includes active participation in the educational programmes. As the membership takes effect it is equally important to take in to account that the opportunities to take part in EU programmes also includes the more distant regions in the new member countries. The new programmes should not lead to a brain drain or a new ruling class but to equal opportunities for all citizens.

As the EU expands eastward one should not forget our neighbours in the south. It is important that we have resources to interact with the educational communities in the south as well if we want to avoid the so called “clash of civilisations.” In an increasingly globalised world it is important to step up the efforts to co-operate with other regions. Because of the diverse nature of the co-operating countries the content and strategy of the co-operation programmes will in practice need to vary significantly.

## **3 Design and structure of the new programme**

EARLALL likes to emphasise the crucial role that regional authorities play when it comes to implementing EU educational policies. In the spirit of true subsidiarity it is important that decisions affecting specific regions are made as close to the citizens as possible. The regional authorities should have a greater degree of ownership over the EU education programmes both with regards to decision making and implementation.

This principle has in many countries been applied with the management and implementation of the European Social Fund. We believe that the regions would greatly benefit if the educational programmes were better synchronised with the overall goals and needs of the specific region. Existing regional authorities could take over many of the responsibilities which are now under national agencies.

EARLALL believes that the European Union could have a more comprehensive approach to learning. In today's modern and complex society we need a coherent frame for the EU education programmes in order to build a true knowledge society.



We may need a more flexible approach to learning than the existing programmes which are mainly based to educational levels (schools, universities, adult education) The future educational could be more goal oriented by being more thematic and integrated than the existing ones.

Finally EARLALL would like to bring to the attention the new concept of three part agreements between the Community and National, Regional and Local authorities [see Com (2002) 709 final]. This approach is worth further investments in research and pilot projects in order to contribute to the making of a true and innovative European knowledge society.

### **Summary and conclusion**

In the White Paper on New Governance the Commission again emphasises the vital role, which local and regional authorities play in the application of community rules and programmes as well as in the building of a more democratic Europe. In a recent update on the White Paper [Com (2002) 705 final] the Commission wishes to further strengthen the links and dialogue with Regional and Local authorities through their own associations on a national and European level and define the scope and conditions for such contacts. It is a clear aspiration for EARLALL to become a recognized partner in a such partnership.

A key component will be valorisation as a strategy to share knowledge and improve the outcome of investment in learning.

For the regional authorities mobility is a key component of the new educational programmes. This mobility needs to be expressed both through increasing opportunities for the citizens to study and work in another member country as well as in the recognition of national diplomas and certificates.

Finally EARLALL wants to point out that the new generation of educational programmes need to maintain a sound combination of both top level research and educational actions against social exclusion.

The General Assembly

Palma, 27/2/2003