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THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Subject : "Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe"  
2006 joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on progress under the "Education & Training 2010" work programme  
- Key messages to the Spring European Council

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Delegations will find attached the set of key messages drawn from the above joint interim report, as they emerged from the Council meeting on 23 February 2006.

**"Modernising education and training:  
a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe"  
2006 joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on progress  
under the "Education & Training 2010" work programme  
- Key messages to the Spring European Council**

*Education and training are vital for growth, jobs and social cohesion*

- Education and training contribute significantly to the solution to the growing socio-economic and demographic challenges with which the EU is confronted in a globalised world: too high a level of unemployment, a large number of low-skilled people, an ageing population and a crucial need to improve the level of competences and qualifications of all citizens.
- Education and training are critical factors if the EU's long-term potential for excellence, innovation and competitiveness, as well as for social cohesion, is to be sustained. The dual role – social and economic – of education and training therefore needs to be reaffirmed, as well as the need to ensure the development of high quality systems which are both efficient and equitable. There can be no trade-off between these two dimensions. The search for excellence at all levels of education and training, including through better links between higher education, research and enterprises as recently discussed by the Heads of State and Government at Hampton Court, should go hand in hand with a search for greater access, social inclusion and active citizenship.
- Education and training must be viewed as a priority for investment. The high returns it provides substantially outweigh the costs and reach far beyond 2010. In this context, the new Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 will be essential. The "Education & Training 2010" process must occupy a central position in the implementation of the national Lisbon reform programmes and the annual progress report at EU level.

*Progress is being made but more substantial efforts are required in key areas*

- Reforms in education and training are moving forward, but more substantial efforts are required. Lifelong learning has been recognised as a *sine qua non* for reaching the Lisbon goals. Member States should as a matter of priority mobilise all necessary means to implement coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. Peer-learning activities and the use of research results will make an important contribution in this respect. To support greater mobility and an efficient European labour market, progress on a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should also be achieved.
  
- Investments, coupled with relevant quality assurance mechanisms, should be targeted on areas where economic returns and social outcomes are high. These areas include improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training and higher education, the acquisition by all of key competences **including language skills**, pre-primary education, the reduction of early school leaving, the professional development of teachers, trainers and school leaders, and adult learning. Greater and more targeted use of the structural funds, especially the European Social Fund, for education and training must be secured.
  
- To enhance the effectiveness and impact of reforms and to share responsibilities and costs, governance should be strengthened, involving relevant stakeholders, in particular through effective inter-ministerial synergies and diverse learning partnerships at all levels (institutions, public authorities, social partners, enterprises, sectoral, regional and local organisations). Concerted efforts are needed by all, if the target of making European education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 is to be achieved.