Quality assurance in higher education: European cooperation

1997/0121(SYN) - 26/02/1998 - Council position

In its common position on the Council recommendation on cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, the Council has taken account of the spirit of most of the amendments proposed by Parliament at first reading (13 amendments of the 38 adopted). These are the amendments which are primarily concerned with the issue of diversity of national cultures concerning evaluation, the definition of a higher education establishment and the impact on higher education of the information society and economic and technological developments. The Council, like Parliament, stresses the importance of transnational mobility for quality education and the importance of quality education for employment. It has also adopted the idea of a link between the socio-cultural and economic functions of education. Other important amendments have been incorporated such as those on the exclusive responsibility of Member States for the organization and structure of higher education systems and on autonomy of universities. Apart from the amendments which were not incorporated by the Commission in its modified proposal, the Council has not adopted some more technical amendments on the education and research mandate of higher education establishments, the expansion and completion of existing structures for the creation of a 'European quality assurance network' and examples of exchanges of information, experience and/or assistance. At the same time, the Council has made some changes to the Commission's basic text and modified the general structure of the initial text by reinforcing the elements of the proposal concerned with 'cooperation between Member States and weakening the role of the Commission. In particular, the Council considered that the detailed request addressed to the Commission to support the establishment of a European quality assurance network was not appropriate. It proposes to transfer this part of the text to Part 1, addressed solely to the Member States. The follow-up measures needed after a teaching quality evaluation also apply exclusively to educational establishments. The new recommendations to the Commission are concerned with intra-Community cooperation in the area of quality assurance (in close cooperation with the Member States and on the basis of existing programmes) and on progress reports carried out in this area. The Council also considered that it was more appropriate to transfer to the annex the principles on which national evaluation and quality assurance systems should be based. The provisions concerning the evaluation procedure itself have been relaxed to take into account the needs of higher education establishments. The Council has omitted a paragraph providing for the Commission to submit appropriate proposals to strengthen quality assurance.