European year of lifelong learning, 1996 (dec. 2493/95/EC). Report

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PURPOSE : to present a report on the implementation of the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996).
CONTENT : this report, which is being submitted in accordance with Article 8 of European Parliament and Council Decision 2493/95/EC on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996) (see procedure COD/1994/0199), seeks to provide an overall assessment of the European Year and to draw some lessons of relevance for future Community activities in the field. From this report, it would appear that the concept of lifelong learning gained acceptance in public opinion and political discussion indicating that the European year was a timely initiative which has helped to change society and attitudes fundamentally, and that it can be claimed to have been one of the more successful initiatives of this type. The European Year set out to promote lifelong learning by acting on both the demand and supply sides : - on the one hand, raising awareness among the general public of the need and the desirability of continuing to learn; - on the other hand, stimulating debate on how delivery systems can cater for new learning needs. The Commission attached great importance to implementing it on a decentralised basis and in close partnership with the bodies designated by the participating countries. Carrying on the operation simultaneously throughout the European economic area gave it added weight, facilitated transnational communication of ideas and exchange of good practice and strengthened the voice of advocates of a lifelong approach to learning in the ongoing education debate in the participating States. The situation encountered in the different States varies considerably as regards both the pre-existing level of penetration of the idea of lifelong learning in general consciousness and the availability of lifelong learning opportunities. Nevertheless, whether it was in areas where the concept was scarcely known or in areas with well- established traditions of lifelong learning, the response encountered was one of enthusiasm, and, above all, one of motivation to improve on the status quo. The budget of 8.34 million Ecus co-financed some 550 projects (representing 5 000 events) at Community, national, regional or local level, to a total value of 34 million Ecus. Press coverage is estimated to have been some 4 000 articles, and there were 80 000 visits to the internet site. Irrespective of the level of funding, the precise impact of the Year cannot really be scientifically measured; however, there is plenty of evidence to support the claim that the initiative has improved the situation in Member States and achieved lasting results. Many new initiatives launched during 1996 or since then in the Member States - in addition to the projects which were cofinanced within the framework of the European Year - have taken up the theme of lifelong learning. These have included major reforms of the education and training systems, measures focusing on educational participation by unrepresented groups, pilot actions and government policy documents. At Community level, the Amsterdam Treaty (as a lasting heritage of the European Year) has enshrined the principle oflifelong learning in the preamble to the the EC Treaty, whereby the Contracting parties state that they are 'determined to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through wide access to education and through its continuous updating'. Equally, this concept received a further impetus from the publication of the Commission's White Paper "Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society" which sets out a series of objectives to generalise lifelong learning throughout European society, or, again, in the Action Plan "Learning in the information society" presented by the Commission in 1996. At the end of the European Year, on 20.12.1996, the Council adopted "Conclusions on a strategy for lifelong learning" which presented a set of principles underpinning a strategy for lifelong learning and a framework of areas for further development.