Learning in the information society: action plan for a European education initiative 1996-1998

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In its adoption of the report by Mrs Birgitta AHLQVIST (PSE, S), Parliament welcomes the Commission's action plan for a European Education Initiative, and calls for the inclusion at all levels of compulsory education, irrespective of the type of school and the level of qualification concerned, of basic instruction in the use of information and communication technologies, with a view to preparing young people for the requirements of the labour market, ensuring equality of opportunity and preventing social exclusion. Parliament stresses the importance of equipment in information and communication technologies on a large scale (including in peripheral regions and regions with low population densities), and reiterates its desire to see all schools given access to information technologies and developments in distance learning techniques. It deplores the fact that existing programmes are aimed exclusively at young people when the information society and the development of the new information and communication technologies is a matter that concerns all of society, irrespective of age or origin (including persons with disabilities and socially excluded adults). Parliament insists that the Commission's action plan should recognize that schools, libraries and neighbourhood centres can provide learning bases for young people from disadvantaged groups, thus preventing the emergence of a new gap between 'those who know and those who do not know'. Priority should be targeted on those members of the public who have the least opportunities of access. Parliament draws attention to the use of the new technologies for leisure purposes, and calls for the encouragement of positive measures aimed at: - avoiding gender stereotypes in the context of the use and development of multimedia content; - empowering girls from an early age to make use of information technology; - providing positive role-models for girls in the development of the information society. Parliament suggests the adoption of innovatory measures to encourage children in the information society, and calls for access for schools to information and communications technologies under special conditions in the context of a universal telecommunications service. Parliament calls on the Member States to fix quantitative targets for the introduction of new technologies in schools and access to those technologies, and asks the Community to coordinate exchanges of experiences by using the Internet as an information tool in relation to Member State initiatives. Parliament calls for the development of a European software and multimedia industry, which recognises and reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe, suggests the creation of a specific budget heading to fund translation of the best educational software and multimedia products to be developed each year, and calls on the Commission to encourage the production and distribution of high-quality teaching materials. Also stressed is the need for suitable basic training for teachers and for schools to be encouraged to link up in groups and organization so that they can benefit from economies of scale in hardware and software purchases. Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to step up the exchange at European level of information and experience on enhancing the educational use of audiovisual material in schools and speed up the dissemination of research findings in the field. In addition, Parliament calls for a thorough reform of the education system with a view to developing opportunities enabling parents and teachers to improve their knowledge; multimedia should be included in the curriculum at all levels and in teacher education. Parliament welcomes the initiative taken by the Member States to set up a Europe-wide school data network, and calls on the Commission to encourage the creation of networks linking schools to each other and to universities. It supports the principle of private-public partnerships, and advocates a code of conduct to ensure that schools on the geographical or social periphery are not disadvantaged. It also calls on the Commission to increase its efforts to combat content harmful to young people. Parliament considers that budgetary constraints should not lead to funding going only to the already most technologically-advanced schools, thus contributing to the creation of an elite of schools; in addition, all of the 'European Schools' should be networked, as rapidly as possible. Finally, Parliament calls for the

ongoing evaluation of the Commission's action plan, and calls on the Member States to publish regular progress reports on the introduction of the new technologies in schools, educational establishments and libraries.