Quality assurance in higher education: European cooperation

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In adopting the report by Mrs Renate Charlotte HEINISCH (PPE, D), the European Parliament has approved the Council recommendation, but feels that a quality assurance system and cooperation among higher education institutions can flourish only on a basis of trust. It therefore considers that a quality assurance system must not be forced on higher education institutions at either national or Community level. It also calls for the cultural multiplicity reflected in the diversity of education systems to be preserved, and the autonomy and distinctive profile of each higher education institution to be maintained. It urges education institutions to ensure that their programmes take account of developments in society and quality criteria on the labour market. In connection with the evaluation report, it suggests involving other interested parties from outside education (social partners, business community, foreign experts, etc.), thus enriching and improving the evaluation process. As regards evaluation proper, it calls for the European dimension of the courses offered to students to be examined as part of European evaluation exercises, but is against laying down centrally determined evaluation standards at European level. It is up to each Member State, in conjunction with its education institutions, to lay down quality criteria suited to its own cultural, educational, economic and institutional traditions, etc. Parliament also stipulates that no opportunity for the promotion of mobility should be overlooked, while upholding the principles of subsidiarity and the autonomy of higher education institutions. Finally, it calls for links to be established in this field with the countries applying to join the Union and for the budget resources and experience gained from the SOCRATES and LEONARDO programmes to be exploited to the full.