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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

from :	General Secretariat of the Council
to :	Council
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Subject :	Contribution of the Council (in the field of youth policy) to the Spring European Council on the implementation of the European Pact for Youth
	– Key messages to the Spring European Council
	– <i>Adoption</i>

Delegations will find attached a set of key messages on further implementation of the European Pact for Youth as they result from the Youth Working Party proceedings, and as endorsed by the Permanent Representatives committee on 2 February 2007.

In the light of its unanimous endorsement of the text, the Permanent Representatives Committee would therefore advise the Council to agree on these key messages with a view to their subsequent submission to the 2007 Spring European Council.

KEY MESSAGES ON FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PACT FOR YOUTH

A. Progress made in 2006 in implementing the European Pact for Youth

Background

- (1) Despite some improvements in the employment situation in Europe, it is apparent when examining National Reform Programmes (NRPs) from a youth perspective that young people on average tend to benefit less from such improvements than adults. Young people, particularly early school leavers and those with fewer opportunities, continue to face many challenges in the various stages of transition between education, training and the labour market.
- (2) Youth unemployment often results from a mismatch between the outcomes of education and training systems and the requirements of the labour market. Insufficient account is taken of those young people who increasingly have to make non-linear transitions into the labour market and who in many cases then find themselves in precarious employment conditions.
- (3) In particular, insufficient attention is paid to the needs of young people who, for personal, social, cultural or economic reasons, are faced with fewer opportunities and whose social participation is consequently seriously restricted.

Action taken

- (4) Member States have implemented a wide range of measures in line with the European Pact for Youth, including training measures, financial incentives for employers to hire young people and the reform of employment services, although the approaches used have not always been sufficiently comprehensive or integrated to produce satisfactory results.
- (5) In its 2006 Annual Lisbon Progress Report¹, the Commission has drawn attention to the need for stronger action to ensure the availability of skilled labour, and for measures aimed at reducing the rate of early school leavers. This target has been incorporated into the 2006 NRPs.

Some progress has been made:

- in ensuring wider availability of skilled labour, so as to prevent bottlenecks in the labour market;
- in increasing employment among certain groups, including young people at high risk of unemployment and the low skilled, in tackling regional employment disparities and in better integrating minorities into employment;
- in limiting early school leaving, particularly through reforms designed to revitalise education and lifelong learning systems, improve the quality of education, strengthen initial and vocational education and training and promote entrepreneurship;
- in implementing the new start by offering young unemployed people a job, an apprenticeship, additional training or other employability measures within six months, or in some Member States three months, of becoming unemployed.

¹ 5074/07 + ADD 1, 2 and 3

- (6) In the field of micro-economic policy, Member States have taken measures to foster entrepreneurship, such as facilitating access to risk capital or special loans, entrepreneurship education or support for young, innovative SMEs.
- (7) In modernising their employment policies, Member States have implemented a wide range of measures in favour of young people:
- concentrating on an inclusive labour market, adopting a 'lifecycle' approach, and developing an integrated approach for those with fewer opportunities;
 - providing better guidance and counselling at the earliest possible stage;
 - implementing measures aimed at reconciling work and family life, such as childcare programmes or employment services.
- (8) A large number of Member States have implemented measures aimed at providing a new start for youth, in line with the commitments taken at the 2006 Spring European Council. In addition, the measures implemented under the European Pact for Youth are being used by Member States as complementary tools to help young people become better integrated. In both cases, evaluation is required by 2008, when the first Lisbon cycle (2006-2007) will come to an end.

B. Key Messages

Young people constitute a valuable resource for both the present and future of the European Union and European society at large. Their potential for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship is needed to achieve the aims of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. It is for this reason that incorporation of the youth dimension into national implementation of the Lisbon Strategy at all levels is crucial.

A comprehensive, cross-sectoral and integrated approach is essential for the successful implementation of the European Pact for Youth. In further implementing the Pact, Member States should emphasise the following priorities:

(1) Particular attention should be paid to young people in the transition period between school education, vocational training and employment.

To ensure favourable framework conditions for the successful social and professional integration of young people, Member States should, in accordance with their national legal and administrative systems, reinforce cross-sectoral coordination between policies at all levels, involving all the relevant political and administrative stakeholders, as well as social partners and non-governmental organisations.

To aid the transition to employment, efforts should be made to ensure a better match between the outcomes of education and training and the requirements of the labour market.

(2) The use of local and regional strategies to implement the European Pact for Youth can play a significant role in ensuring high-quality measures aimed at better social and professional integration.

When implementing the European Pact for Youth, implementation strategies are required which take account of local and regional characteristics, in order to strengthen the active participation of all those involved at local and regional level, including young people themselves, their networks and organisations.

(3) Through individually tailored measures, all young people should be offered equal opportunities for social and professional integration.

Individually tailored measures, aimed at taking account of the capabilities and specific circumstances of each young person, especially those with fewer opportunities, should be developed and followed up in partnership with the young persons concerned. These aspects should be strengthened in the current debate on flexicurity, with a view to proposing concrete measures to combat the segmentation of certain labour markets, to promoting better jobs for young people and maintaining motivation. Measures aimed at enabling young people to reconcile family, private and professional life should also be taken.

(4) To enhance the social and professional integration of young people, governance of the Lisbon Strategy needs a more visible youth dimension.

In taking forward the Lisbon strategy, it is important that the needs of young people are taken into account and that – together with youth policy stakeholders – young people themselves actively participate in taking decisions which affect their lives. This can be achieved at national level by ensuring that youth aspects are always taken into account when considering all relevant aspects of National Reform Programmes; this in turn would lead to a more visible youth dimension within the Annual Progress Report.

Against this background and within the existing framework of European cooperation on youth policy, an ongoing and genuine exchange of experience, best practice and youth research findings concerning the implementation of the European Pact for Youth will be initiated by Youth Ministers and, in coordination with other relevant Ministers, taken forward by the Member States and the Commission, with a view to actively contributing towards the aims of the Lisbon Agenda.
