

RECOMMENDATION 125/2011¹

Lifelong Learning in the BSEC Member States

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation recognizes that cooperation in the field of education positively contributes to further bilateral and multilateral cooperation and that education and training play a key role in the European integration process while promoting sustainable development, stability and prosperity in all BSEC Member States.
2. To this end, the Assembly has always placed great emphasis on educational issues. The wide range of relevant Recommendations adopted by the Assembly include: Ratification and Implementation of the Black Sea Convention on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Education, Science and Information (3/1994); Cooperation among the PABSEC Member Countries of the Improvement of Education (10/1995); Cooperation of the Academic Communities of the BSEC Member Countries and its Legal Framework (27/1998); Mutual recognition of Higher Education Diplomas by the PABSEC Member-Countries (31/1998); Black Sea Universities Network: Contribution to the BSEC Academic Cooperation (56/2001); Cultural, educational and social aspects of the EU enlargement: consequences for the Black Sea Region (86/2005); The Bologna Process and the reforms of higher educational systems in the BSEC countries (97/2007).
3. At the same time, the Assembly is fully aware that new challenges brought along with globalization and the knowledge economy, force individuals to update and adapt their skills and competences to new work environments and forms of social organization. In this context, some aspects of the established educational systems are put to question and the need to develop more holistic and comprehensive systems of learning has become obvious.

¹ *Rapporteur*: Mrs. Zhala Aliyeva , Chairperson of the Committee – Azerbaijan

Assembly debate on 23 May 2012 (see Doc.: GA39/CC37/REP/11, *Report of the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee on Lifelong Learning in the BSEC Member States*, discussed in Baku, on 29 September 2011; *Rapporteur*: Mr. Necati Çetinkaya, Member of the Committee, Turkey).

Text adopted by the Thirty-Ninth General Assembly in Yerevan on 23 May 2012.

4. The Assembly also expresses concern over, on one hand, the demographic challenges facing BSEC Member States and the threat they pose for the quantity and quality of the workforce and, on the other, the current financial crisis which has had a strong impact on the Black Sea region. The Assembly firmly believes that reforms in the areas of competitiveness and productivity are key to confronting these challenges. Consequently, reforms in education and training are to be given high priority. Integrating the lifelong learning approach in the educational systems of the BSEC Member States could provide a comprehensive response to current challenges by boosting the region's human capital while contributing to personal and community development and social cohesion.
5. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that BSEC Member States are increasingly aware of the importance of continuous education and training and have been developing, to a greater or lesser extent, strategies and plans on the basis of the lifelong learning concept. Nevertheless, there is often a gap between rhetoric and reality, since in many cases the concept has yet to be clarified in order to proceed to policy designing. Strategies for implementation of lifelong learning policies are in place in some member states. Attention should be paid to overambitious goals which often hamper the practical implementation of measures laid out in strategic plans.
6. The Assembly commends the efforts made by BSEC within the framework of the Working Group on Education, particularly regarding projects such as the creation of a BSEC Portal on Education. Given the important role of information and communication technologies in today's world, such projects could significantly contribute to broadening cooperation in the field of education by involving a greater number of people and institutions of the region.
7. The Assembly also supports the current efforts for enhanced cooperation between BSEC and the European Union and for the establishment of a working relationship, with a view to achieving an operational framework for cooperation in the field of educational affairs.
8. **Therefore, the PABSEC recommends** that the parliaments and the governments of the BSEC Member States:
 - i. *develop* and *implement* comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategies involving all relevant stakeholders, including the civil society and local and regional authorities;
 - ii. *allocate* resources for such strategies by raising public expenditures on education while developing initiatives to stimulate private investment in learning;
 - iii. *strengthen* the links and co-ordination with early childhood care and education in lifelong learning frameworks and strategies;
 - iv. *reform* primary and secondary education curricula with a view to equipping children for autonomous, creative and innovative thinking which would set the basis for further learning in adult life;

- v. *better link* vocational education and training to national economies in order to tailor the educational process to the labour market;
- vi. *modernise* university curricula in order to meet current and future socio-economic needs;
- vii. *improve* students' and teachers' mobility, including mobility between countries, programmes and disciplines;
- viii. *develop* targeted adult education and lifelong learning programs addressing the most disadvantaged groups in the labor market, especially youth, women, rural populations, migrants, and the elderly;
- ix. *guarantee* as many social services and supporting facilities (such as childcare) as possible to all students and workers with families;
- x. *put into place* lifelong learning guidance services and information to learners of all age groups in order to enhance motivation and maximum participation;
- xi. *promote* media literacy and ICT knowledge as an integral part of the curriculum at all levels of schooling as well as offer media teaching modules for teachers and the elderly;
- xii. *facilitate* the transition between different education and training systems and between formal, non-formal and informal learning and take effective measures to validate learning outcomes;
- xiii. *promote* learning at the workplace, in cooperation with education and training establishments and the social partners;
- xiv. *improve* the education and training of teachers and trainers involved in lifelong learning so that they acquire the necessary teaching skills for the knowledge society;
- xv. *invest* in lifelong learning as a research area and promote the use of research results in policy development and implementation;
- xvi. *implement* regular recording and tracking mechanisms to collect valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data to inform policy-making in adult learning and education.
- xvii. *make use of* existing tools such as the BSEC portal on education to disseminate such data that countries may use to measure changes, to evaluate change over time and to share good practices.

9. **The PABSEC invites** the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to consider this Recommendation.