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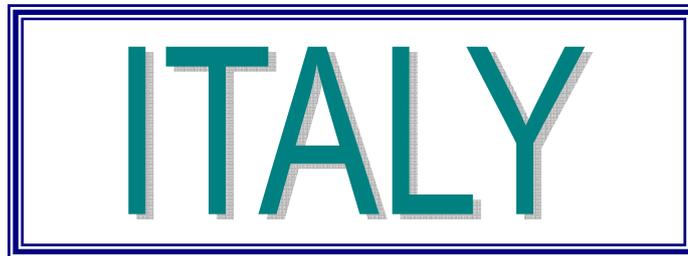
Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies  
Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies

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## IMPLEMENTING THE 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010'

### WORK PROGRAMME

# 2005 Progress Report



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# Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca

DIPARTIMENTO PER L'ISTRUZIONE

DIREZIONE GENERALE PER GLI AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI DELL'ISTRUZIONE  
SCOLASTICA

## A FULL INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE NATIONAL POLICY OBJECTIVES AND THE GOALS SET BY THE LISBON PROCESS

Italy has endorsed and started implementing the process launched by the Lisbon European Council and the related agenda containing common objectives in the field of education and training.

To this end, Italy has adopted a set of measures within the framework of the five priority areas, with a view to ensuring a higher quality of education systems (document approved by the EU Education Council in May 2003).

Since its coming to power, the current Government has focused its action on initiatives aimed at achieving the Lisbon objectives. Indeed, under the Italian Presidency of the EU, it introduced some innovative elements that were then adopted by the Commission and other Member States, namely enhanced cooperation on issues of common interest and regular monitoring of the achievement of common objectives.

Under the Italian EU Presidency, Italy promoted a specific initiative on human capital, which is seen as a key factor for social cohesion and economic growth, on the basis of the following guidelines:

- the definition of strategies and measures aimed at classifying financial support to education and training as investment expenditure;
- the adoption of an innovative approach to analyse education and training needs, whose detection is based on the features of the demand. It will be thus possible to identify the segments of the population in which the gap is greatest between potential to contribute to the economic development and social stability of the country and what these segments actually contribute to the development and stability;

- the definition of activities aimed at ensuring coherence and complementarity between education and training policies on the one hand, and social and employment policies on the other.

Likewise, in line with Objectives 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, Italy has reaffirmed the importance of making school, work environment and everyday life open spaces for learning, which are able to proactively face the pressures coming from young people and other contexts contributing to their personal and social growth (Council Resolution of 25.11.2003, C 295/02).

At the national level, improving the quality of education and training and ensuring a high level of social cohesion are the key objectives of Italian education and employment policies, which are thoroughly expressed in the Education Reform Act (n. 53/2003) and the Labour Market Reform Act (n. 30/2003).

It will be possible to achieve the abovementioned goals by integrating the following elements:

- the strengthening of school autonomy;
- the development of personalised study tracks, allowing students to choose more freely according to their aptitudes, talents, interests and aspirations;
- a wide diversification of the education and training tracks on offer, some being mainly academically-oriented, others mainly vocationally-oriented;
- the possibility for learners to move from one education path to the other, in line with the principle of combining education, training and work;
- a move away from the concept of compulsory school attendance till a required age to the principle of the right and obligation to receive education. Everybody is guaranteed the right to education and training for at least twelve years or until the learner obtains a qualification (by the age of 18) either in general education or in vocational education and training, with both systems enjoying equal status;
- the development of National Guidelines and Lines of action for initial and continuous guidance and counselling;
- the implementation of a national evaluation system to assess the quality of the school system;
- the active participation of parents in school life;
- the strengthening of the ties between education and the world of work.

## **PRIORITY AREAS FOR INVESTMENT AND REFORM**

The legal framework introduced in the past three years is producing a coherent and integrated system of lifelong learning policies.

The analysis of expenditure confirms the commitment of Italy to implement LLL strategies. Estimates, although not fully consolidated, indicate that the total expenditure - comprising the different stakeholders (firms, public administration, regional governments, families) - reached 6.5 billion euros in 2002.

The important and constant increase in expenditure (around 10% per year on average) is undoubtedly an indicative element.

As for policy planning, Italy has identified as priority actions those related to the five benchmarks approved in May 2003.

The main actions carried out in each area are described below.

### **Diminishing the percentage of early school leavers**

Since guidance and counselling play a strategic role in the knowledge society, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), in cooperation with HEIs, the Welfare Ministry, local authorities and other stakeholders, has developed a proposal for a "National Guidance Plan – Guidelines and Lines of action". The National Guidance Committee is in charge of defining the organisational and operational strategy of the Integrated National Guidance System, in line with local requirements and the needs of young people.

A number of cooperation projects have been launched between schools and enterprises which aim to produce models integrating school education and temporary work placement.

An important innovation is the enhancement of apprenticeship, which allow the young person to fulfil his/her right and obligation to education and training, while providing him/her with work experience.

These projects have helped to significantly reduce the number of young people leaving education and training before the age of 18.

The implementation of these initiatives has also been supported by a more effective use of the Structural Funds, and in particular the ESF, within the framework of the 2000-2006 National Operational Programme "School for Development".

### **Completion of upper secondary education**

As for the secondary cycle, the Education Reform Act 53/2003 provides for a single system comprising two pathways with equal status: general education (mainly academically-oriented) and vocational education and training (mainly vocationally-oriented).

The Labour Market Reform Act 30/03 provides for an occupational apprenticeship scheme (2nd type), which is a main pathway into the labour market.

The new laws provide learners with the possibility to move from general education to vocational training and vice versa. This system thus allows students to change their minds and make their cultural and educational choices according to their personal interests and aptitudes.

Work-study programmes, or school/work alternance have also been established to exploit the education and training potential of the business sector and to give learners the opportunity to experience the world of work.

#### *Diminishing the percentage of low-achieving 15 year olds in reading literacy*

In the past three years, three pilot projects on assessing achievement in Italian, mathematics and science have been implemented, involving thousands of schools.

More recently, a national action plan for the improvement of basic skills was launched. This includes activities to be carried out with the support of regional providers. The plan comprises:

- the putting in place of new initial and in-service teacher training;
- the introduction of compulsory support activities for students with learning difficulties;
- the strengthening of synergies and opportunities for informal learning;
- the systematic monitoring of competencies by the National Evaluation Service.

#### **Graduates in scientific disciplines**

The MIUR, Confindustria (Confederation of Italian Industry) and the National Conference of Deans of Science Departments have launched the “Science Degrees Project”, aimed at improving the learning and attractiveness of scientific disciplines as well as increasing the number of graduates in these subjects. The project focuses on the following actions:

- preliminary guidance in school, including the introduction of new teaching methods for scientific subjects and an enhanced use of labs by students;
- setting up a wide-ranging training programme for science teachers in secondary education;
- an increase of the training activities and temporary work placements organised by Universities, to let students gain the professional experience needed to enter the labour market;
- strengthening the system of post-graduate degrees, in particular masters courses organised in cooperation with business associations, local authorities, professional associations, public and private bodies;
- classifying scientific degrees, in order to have university tracks more closely meet the needs of the professional labour market.

## **Participation in lifelong learning activities**

Italy is fully committed to promoting lifelong learning and to developing the skills of the employed workforce, both on the financial and strategic level. This trend is definitely on the increase as the proportion of workers attending training courses rose from 13.9% in 2000 to 19% in 2003.

The various training schemes for the employed are rapidly developing, in particular training on demand. These schemes provide ad-hoc tools for specific target groups (women, temp job workers, workers with atypical contracts, civil servants). It is important to underline that these training activities are constantly monitored and assessed, with a view to improving their planning.

In view of developing a system to support policies aimed at preventing unemployment and at safeguarding employment levels, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has promoted and financed a number of projects proposed by bilateral bodies after consultation with social partners.

These actions are directed towards creating a “system” to review training needs on a regular basis with a view to matching supply and demand and to providing constant and systematic support for the business world, the training system and employment seekers.

In addition, MIUR is acting to improve and strengthen the system of lifelong learning provision, both by creating integrated networks with local adult learning centres (CTPs) and by adopting specific measures to support evening courses at upper secondary level.

Over 400,000 learners – 116,000 of whom are foreigners – attend the CTPs, where the educational opportunities on offer are increasing steadily.

The Higher Technical Education and Training System (IFTS) has also been strengthened, with the aim of enhancing higher technical specialisation and qualification standards for young people and adults.

Besides the five top priority areas defined at EU level within the framework of the “Education and Training 2010” process, Italy has identified other important areas of action, such as:

- the training of teachers and trainers;
- the ensuring of maximum access to information and communication technologies;
- foreign language learning.

## **Training of teachers and trainers**

Already a number of years ago, Italy adopted new modalities for initial teacher training by establishing specific Specialisation Schools and university degrees.

Specialisation Schools provide two-year post-graduate courses focused on three areas: the education sciences, teaching methodology in the subject chosen, in-depth study of the same subject.

As for in-service training, an important teacher-training programme has been launched, which supports the implementation of the new schooling levels and focuses on the new teaching and pedagogical models which are needed to implement the reform.

Training activities are based on a blended learning solution which involves both on-line and tutored classes tailored to meet the different professional needs of the teachers involved.

Furthermore, specific training courses have been set up for primary school teachers of English and lower-secondary school teachers of foreign languages, since the reform has established that a second EU language is to be studied at this stage.

#### *Ensuring maximum access to information and communication technologies*

MIUR is working intensely to strengthen the Development Programme for Educational Technologies, which involves the whole school system, from pre-school to upper secondary education.

A programme has been put in place for the initial and continuous training of school staff on the use of education technologies.

The Education Reform Act n. 53/2003 provides everyone - and young people in particular - with more and more concrete opportunities for accessing ICT. Computer science is studied starting from the first year of primary school.

This objective will be achieved through two complementary actions:

- the setting up of a computerised network infrastructure, with broadband cabling and satellite reception equipment in schools;
- the delivery of ICT training to school teachers through an integrated system of classroom activity and tutored self-directed learning.

#### **Foreign language learning.**

In compliance with the Education Reform Act, English is taught as a foreign language starting from the first year of primary education, with a second EU language being introduced in lower-secondary school.

Specific teacher training programmes are being organised to help teachers strengthen their foreign language skills as well as their teaching skills.

A number of initiatives have been developed in cooperation with the ministries of foreign countries, in particular with the Department for Education and Skills (UK).

The project “Divertinglese” is a joint RAI TV-MIUR initiative for pupils. It is also a tool to support the English courses on offer in primary schools. Its satellite broadcasts can be used by both schools and families for extra training and distance learning.

At university level, in accordance with the EU e-learning strategies, four open universities have been set up to meet the demands of those users who cannot attend traditional universities (disabled people, workers, etc.).

#### **LEARNERS AT THE CORE OF LIFELONG LEARNING POLICIES**

The implementation of lifelong learning strategies concerning education, training and the world of work crosses all the sectors involved in the reform process.

This approach is based on the principle that places the main focus on the learners themselves. Lifelong learning strategies are implemented thanks to the interaction of different systems, institutions and social players which have their own specificities but pursue a common goal: to support the educational and training development of individuals.

Lifelong learning involves schools, vocational training centres, volunteer organisations, private social entities, universities, businesses and their associations, libraries, museums and the other agencies established by local authorities.

The agreement signed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2000 within the Unified Conference of the State – Regions – Provinces – Municipalities and Mountain Communities laid the foundations to develop an integrated adult education and training system which operates at three different but interconnected levels: national, regional and local. At each level a Consultation Committee has been set up to carry out the integration process.

Social partners are key players on the various levels of the national lifelong learning strategies. They are directly involved – through consultation – in several issues regarding lifelong education and training, especially continuous training and adult education.

Social partners also play a major role at local level in supporting the decision-making process in specific areas (professional development needs analysis, analysis and development of proposals for educational provision, promotion of long-term policies to anticipate demand).

In the field of continuous training, Interprofessional Funds have been established requiring social partners to propose and outline strategies but also guarantee they are managed.

The Ministry of Welfare has authorised 10 bilateral funds since 2002 and in 2003 and 2004 it allocated substantial funds to launch the system (190 million euros).

These innovations aim at improving the quality of the system, by helping to bridge the gap between training supply and the demand coming from employers and employees.

Individual lifelong learning is therefore the key principle of policies aimed at promoting active citizenship and the development of human capital. “Individual demand” is the most innovative way to access public funding for continuous training, its learner-centred approach being the closest to the lifelong learning strategy.

The integrated reform process involving the education and training systems gives people the opportunity to have previously acquired learning recognised, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

In compliance with the provisions contained in the agreement signed within the Unified Conference of the State – Regions – Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano – Municipalities – Mountain Communities dated 28 October 2004, a process has been initiated to facilitate the recognition of skills acquired both in formal and non-

formal systems. This will allow the weakest population groups to take up learning again, complete their education programme and update their skills.

The agreement has a unifying basis - both at national and regional levels - and is founded on a set of shared fundamental principles:

- the unity and equal status of education and training systems;
- the recognition of previously acquired certifications and credits to facilitate the mobility between education and training pathways (also supported by specific measures);
- the enhanced value of vocational qualifications;
- widening the range of end users of the agreement to include even 18-year-olds.

The minimum standards for basic cultural competencies related to language, science, technology and the historical-economic-social disciplines have been established within a framework aiming not only to ensure the employability of people, but also to guarantee full citizenship rights ensuing from an acquired background of basic cultural skills.

A national system for credit recognition and intermediate or final certification for vocational education and training courses has been established together with regional and local authorities. This can be referred to when moving from one training programme to another, thus encouraging young people and adults to take up education again, capitalizing on the skills previously acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. Thanks to this agreement, for the first time vocational training has its own nation-wide valid certification system.

A certification scheme for the vocational training system has been set up, based on the principle of equal status with the education system. The scheme has been developed in accordance with the “Adult Education Glossary”, agreed upon by all stakeholders, and the procedures already in use in the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. Two models have been approved: one related to final certification, for those completing a training programme, and another for intermediate certification, for those leaving the programme at an earlier stage.

The elements described in the intermediate and final certifications are crucial within the Citizen’s Training Portfolio (*Libretto formativo del cittadino*), introduced by the Labour Market Reform Act.

The Portfolio has been defined by the Welfare Ministry and the MIUR in agreement with the Unified Conference of the State - Regions and after consultation with social partners. The Portfolio records the skills acquired through training programmes organised by certified agencies and those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, in keeping with the EU guidelines for lifelong learning and provided that they are recognised and certified.

The Portfolio is the key instrument to ensure the transparency of lifelong learning, in that it officially records data, diplomas and credits that can be used for training, professional development and labour mobility.

The Portfolio is the Italian equivalent of EUROPASS, and has been conceived to increase national mobility through various educational and professional experiences.

The development of human capital and the promotion of active citizenship through lifelong learning are primarily expressed in the actions carried out for the consolidation and improvement of basic skills in adults, in line with the goals set by the Lisbon Council to be achieved by 2010.

Educational provision for adults is constantly increasing. Over the last year, 546 local adult learning centres (CTP, dedicated centres for adult education providing training and counselling services, courses on basic literacy skills and functional competencies, language learning, IT courses in cooperation with schools and external training agencies) and 686 secondary schools, holding evening courses have run over 23,000 courses for more than 450,000 users. The activities here, some of which are carried out in partnership, are aimed at strengthening basic skills and at facilitating the take up of training or education programmes by adults leading to a diploma or a certification of vocational qualification.

A new organisational model ensures the networking of local adult learning centres with secondary schools in order to raise the education standards of the adult population – thus being consistent with the EU objectives - and also to make training and educational provision more flexible, to enhance the skills adults may have already acquired on the job or elsewhere, and to test innovative teaching methodologies also using e-learning.

## **THE REFORM OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The reform of the tertiary education system includes non-academic higher technical education and training.

The IFTS system (Higher Technical Education and Training) was introduced in Italy with Law n. 144/99. The system aims to train technicians and professionals who are skilled enough to work in firms, public administration and highly specialized production sectors, characterized by high technological innovation and the internationalisation of markets.

The system includes different programmes leading to the acquisition or strengthening of basic skills (language, mathematics, science, technology, economics, business administration), cross-curricular competencies (organisational, communication and relational) as well as technical-professional skills as proactively expressed by the specific requirements of the labour market.

A feature of IFTS programmes is the structural integration of the different institutional players involved (upper secondary schools, universities, vocational training centres, businesses) which work jointly at all stages (from the development to the actual implementation of training projects).

The beneficiaries of such programmes are both young people and adults, whether employed or unemployed, holding an upper secondary school diploma or equivalent qualification gained on the job. Between 1999 and 2004, over 44,000 young people and adults were trained. Most of them found a job within a year after completing the course or, as in the case for employed adults, improved their job position.

On November 25th 2004, a specific agreement was signed within the Unified Conference of the State, the Regions and Local Authorities to set up Training Poles related to specific production sectors in the next three years, starting from those characterizing the so-called 'Made in Italy' sectors.

Poles have been established and programmes developed countrywide to root the IFTS system, capitalizing on existing know-how and setting up close structural links among education, training, research and technology transfer, the ultimate goal being the creation of human capital which is needed to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Through the creation of these poles, new organisational models for the provision of vocational education and training are emerging.

It is worth mentioning the first organisational models that have been produced in three projects: POLIS for platurgy and wireless technologies (Piedmont and Sardinia), CAMPUS for industrial automation and ICT (Lombardy) as well as the multi-regional training initiative in the shoe-making sector (Lombardy, Veneto, Marche, Apulia and Emilia Romagna).

The common innovative aspects of such organisational models are:

- a strong, broad, locally-rooted partnership with multi-year commitments;
- sector-related approach;
- active involvement of social partners;
- systematic involvement of the scientific and technological research community;
- special focus on multi-regional cooperation and the European dimension.

### **University**

As a result of the harmonisation process of higher education systems – launched with the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998 and the Bologna Declaration of 1999 - Italy has implemented a number of reforms. Regulation No. 509 adopted on 3 November 1999 and the subsequent Ministerial Decree No. 270 of 24 November 2004 are particularly important. In compliance with the Bologna Declaration, the Regulation defines the new structure of university tracks and allows the Italian Universities to autonomously plan their curricula, within the framework of a set of general criteria.

Regulation No. 509 of 1999 only establishes the general criteria which the Universities have to comply with in developing their pathways. For each 'type of track (called *classe*) the Ministry fixes a certain number of teaching activities (for instance, core subjects and characterising subjects). As a general rule, the disciplines decided by the Ministry account for no more than 50% of the credits set for each 'type of track', with the exception being made for those leading up to chartered professions. The remaining 50% of credits are awarded through courses planned by Universities, in compliance with their educational objectives and professional profiles.

The new system is based on two cycles (3 years+2 years), and aims at fostering the international mobility of students and the free movement of professionals, while promoting the international recognition of diplomas and qualifications.

With the revision of teaching methods, students' needs are now at the heart of the learning process. The revision is based on the use of credits (ECTS - European Credit

Transfer System). The introduction of CFU (Crediti Formativi Universitari - University Learning Credits) allows to bridge the gap between the officially set length of university study programmes and their real length to reduce the significant number of early university leavers. Thanks to specific actions (guidance and counselling, tutoring, new teaching methods) the proportion of early university leavers has decreased from 66% to 48% in the past few years.

Moreover, the reform aims at improving employment possibilities for graduates by bringing university curricula closer to the new trends in labour demand and to innovation in the production system. A number of measures have also been introduced to promote and support the international dimension of universities:

- the possibility to award joint degrees with foreign universities;
- the recognition of study periods, credits and qualifications obtained abroad with a view to pursuing studies;
- the compulsory learning of at least one EU language besides Italian;
- the possibility to take final exams in a foreign language;
- the introduction of a diploma supplement.

The reform has redesigned university qualifications as follows:

- First level degree or “laurea” (L)
- Second level degree or “laurea magistrale” (LM)
- Doctorate degree (DR)
- Specialisation diploma (DS)

Universities are also entitled to set up post-graduate advanced studies and specialisation courses catering to recurrent and continuing education needs. These tracks lead up to a first or second level master’s degrees, which may then feed into other higher education study programmes.

Italy has also set up a national database of higher education provision, in order to monitor the study tracks and verify their compliance with national standards. The Evaluation Committee has defined a set of minimum structural requirements (number of teaching staff, lecture rooms, labs, libraries) for each track in order to obtain funding.

Furthermore, a first set of quality indicators has been developed, which will be used to approve new degree pathways. A process has thus been launched that in a short time is meant to lead all university study programmes from the pre-accreditation phase to a real accreditation system.

## **MEASURES ADOPTED TO ENHANCE QUALITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

The Education Reform Act grants equal status to the two systems since they both rely on the ultimate goal of ensuring common educational, cultural and professional outcomes. This is a major innovation since the law lays down that both general education (*licei*) and vocational education and training aim to achieve the same educational, cultural and professional objectives although they may use different paths and methodologies.

While implementing regulations for this reform are in the development stage, experimental programmes have been launched thanks to an agreement with the Regions and Local Authorities. The programmes have the following features:

- they last at least three years;
- they include subjects related to both general and specific education having the same educational value;
- they lead to a nationally recognized vocational qualification corresponding at least to the European second level.

These organisational models include actions such as counselling, tutoring, customisation and support to disadvantaged groups to be carried out through the so-called LARSAs (specific courses to develop or refresh skills).

The LARSA courses are addressed to specific target groups:

- groups of learners in homogeneous tracks needing to refresh or improve skills;
- individual learners or groups in transition from one educational track to another;
- people or groups of people with learning difficulties and who are not included in mainstream training or education programmes.

Customised skills realignment programmes are developed for such specific target groups and are aimed at refreshing, updating or developing their skills so that they can reach an appropriate education level before accessing the chosen educational track. These programmes also cater for people who do not have the necessary initial education or are experiencing difficulties in their learning.

In order to make vocational training more attractive, relationships with industry and the world of work are specifically supported.

In the wake of innovations introduced by Law 53/03, the results of projects implemented by schools and training institutions in recent years have been valorised, which allow young people to freely express their vocational potential and experiment their aptitudes, in order to also improve transition opportunities into the labour market or to raise awareness when making choices about further studies.

Thanks to the apprenticeship scheme and to cooperation with employers' associations, chambers of commerce and other players in the labour market, a strategic

plan has become operational which fosters the development of on-the-job initiatives (training and placement periods, etc.).

A significant initiative in this context is the implementation of the “Telematic network of simulated enterprises” project in cooperation with a number of other European countries. This project enables students to act as if they were working in a business. The school itself sets up its own internal simulated business which can be used to help students learn the various phases of the production process and experience different corporate roles.

A legislative decree has recently been passed containing “General rules on school-work alternance”. This document is another major step in the education system reform process.

The provisions in the decree are aimed at fostering the development of stable relations between schools and training centres and the world of work, in line with the recommendations of the European Union. The school-work alternance model is another way of providing secondary level training for students aged between 15 and 18 years. This kind of includes classroom-based learning alternated with periods of on-the-job training. Acknowledged credits for such programmes and the related supplementary certifications granted by schools certifying the skills acquired constitute a recognized basis upon which the young person may access further training opportunities and, eventually, find a job.

To this end, several initiatives to make these programmes systematic have been implemented in cooperation with Confindustria (Confederation of Italian Industry), the Chambers of Commerce (Unioncamere) and Employers’ Associations.

Thanks to experimental projects, 1,772 programmes have been started, involving 412 schools (about 13% of all Italian schools) and 20,431 students aged between 15 and 17.

## **STRATEGIES AND MEASURES TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF EDUCATION**

Actions carried out in Italy aim to:

- strengthen cooperation in the field of higher education, internationalise universities and increase mobility;
- train teacher on European citizenship also through the creation of the *PuntoEdu Europa* web site;
- build a regionally-rooted organisational model to promote and develop the European dimension of education through the setting up of specific support task forces for European cooperation in each Italian region (“Europa dell’Istruzione” Education for Europe).

## **Strengthening cooperation in the field of higher education, internationalisation of universities and increased mobility**

In December 2004, MIUR launched the call for proposals for the III internationalisation programme. For the period 2004-2006, 15 million euros have been allocated to co-finance a number of projects proposed by universities, aimed at strengthening the international dimension, improving the quality of the education and research system as well as the competitiveness of universities at international level. In particular the fund will finance the mobility of the various types of internal players (teaching staff, students, researchers, technical and administrative staff), within the framework of:

- integrated university study programmes providing for the joint participation of teaching staff and students from at least one foreign country, the mutual recognition of study periods and qualifications, and the award of joint or double degrees;
- research projects in partnership with foreign researchers;
- transnational initiatives.

In line with national policies for the internationalisation of the Italian university system, another significant innovation in terms of eligible projects is the implementation of joint research programmes providing for the mobility of Italian and foreign teaching staff, researchers, and PhD students.

The quality assurance process necessarily carried out by universities for the proposed initiatives and the monitoring instruments and activities implemented by MIUR are other featured policy highlights.

### *Promotion of student and researcher mobility*

Through Law 170 of 11 July 2003, MIUR has established a national fund to foster the international mobility of young students and researchers. The fund amounts to 13 million euros per year: 60% is allocated to increase the amount of Erasmus scholarships and 40% to finance new scholarships.

The fund also allocates resources to increase scholarships for the mobility of PhD students taking part in international networks.

With a view to fostering mobility, MIUR and Confindustria signed an agreement on 21/9/2004 to implement a plan to attract foreign students to Italian schools and universities.

Italy has also signed bilateral agreements with China, Israel, Japan and the US establishing exchange programmes for undergraduate students (first level degree), based on the Erasmus model.

MIUR is also taking part in the Marco Polo project, in partnership with CRUI and Confindustria, aimed at promoting the mobility of researchers and students between Italy and Asia (China and India in particular).

## **Recognition of qualifications**

A further strengthening of the internationalisation process of Italian educational opportunities has been launched in the recent years with the participation in the “Lisbon Convention” and its subsequent ratification (Ratification of the Lisbon Convention, Law No. 148 of 11 July 2002), instituting the “National Information Centre on the Recognition of Qualifications”.

Today Italy has a legal framework providing for the recognition of professional qualifications obtained abroad both in the EU (through the absorption of general and sectoral Community Directives on the free movement of professionals) and non-EU countries (through the implementing regulation of the consolidation act on immigration).

Thanks to the recognition of professional qualifications, it is possible to take part in open competitions for civil service posts for people holding qualification obtained in another EU country, as recognised by the Italian Department for Public Administration.

Another legal framework - inspired by the principles of the Lisbon Convention - governs the academic recognition of foreign qualifications, thus enabling the pursuit of further studies in the country (Implementing Regulation of the Ratification of the Lisbon Convention, regulating the accreditation of branches of foreign universities based in Italy – DM 214 of 26/04/04).

### **Improving the competitiveness and attractiveness of European Higher Education in the world**

During the Italian presidency of the European Union, a renewed inter-university cooperation scheme with Mediterranean countries was launched actively involving all the necessary stakeholders, with a view to creating a Euro-Mediterranean area of higher education.

In compliance with the EU objectives and MIUR guidelines and priorities directed to the internationalisation of Italian universities, the idea was to create an “integrated” Euro-Mediterranean system of higher education employing the most innovative methodological and technological tools, thus promoting the principle of harmonisation while respecting the characteristics of each system.

The informal meeting of Higher Education Ministers of Mediterranean Countries, held in Catania on 7-8 November 2003, laid the basis for joint cooperation between EU and Mediterranean countries. It also created a valuable cultural bridge for the setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean area of higher education, aimed at preparing the professional and scientific leadership in our countries, as well as enhancing the role of existing HEI of high quality and prestige.

It was then decided to carry out the following key actions:

- to create a Mediterranean Network of Institutes for Advanced Studies and Research;
- to develop a distance learning system in the Mediterranean area;
- to launch a specific mobility programme for Mediterranean students and teaching staff in the new higher education area;

- to set up a digital library accessible from all the countries of the Mediterranean area.

Of the four foreseen, two actions for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean area for advanced studies and research were particularly developed in 2004:

- the setting up of a network of centres of excellence, where the mobility of students, teaching and research staff is promoted;
- the development of a distance learning system for the Mediterranean area.

The implementation of the third and fourth actions will necessarily follow from the preliminary work on the first two.

During the second meeting, held in Catania in January 2005, six Memoranda of Understanding were signed for the establishment of six centres in the following countries:

- **Morocco:** e-business management (e-tourism, e-Agro-Food, e-Government)
- **Tunisia:** ICT (media science and technology)
- **Egypt:** Agro-Food (agriculture in barren grounds)
- **Crete:** nanotechnology (Onassis Foundation)
- **Turkey:** seismic risk (civil defence and buildings in seismic areas)
- **Palestine:** international cooperation for development

Finally, a MoU with Syria is underway (archaeology and cultural heritage).

### **Teacher training on European citizenship; *PuntoEdu Europa web site***

The Education Reform Act n. 53/2003 and the “National Guidelines” set the primary educational goals for personal development. One of them is education for civil coexistence, based on the concept of active citizenship and solidarity exercised at national and European level, as expressed through the rights and obligations of citizenship and linked to migration policies and intercultural dialogue.

In order to achieve these goals, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research implemented the National Project called “Education for citizenship and solidarity: the culture of human rights”. This is both a teacher-training project and an action-research project for students.

The project focuses mainly on the acquisition of social skills and the understanding of the culture of citizenship and solidarity, on citizenship education and on European citizenship education.

The project is implemented in cooperation with Universities, Local Authorities and NGOs.

The national project runs parallel to a European teacher training pilot project on the issue of “European citizenship education” involving France, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Spain.

The training programme also includes the creation of an ad hoc web site named “PuntoEdu Europa” which contains thematic training packages, a specific section with teaching materials and a discussion forum for teachers.

### **“Europa dell’Istruzione” (Educating for Europe)**

Within the framework of a broader strategy to ensure both sustainable economic growth and greater social cohesion, awareness concerning the central role of education and training policies has grown enormously since the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

Building a European area of education implies increased integration between the European and national dimensions of education policies.

To this end, MIUR has set up a coordination process with regional education authorities to promote the European dimension of education. Its main purpose is to make schools and local stakeholders aware of the opportunities offered by our membership in the European Union and to synergically boost the integrated use of available transnational cooperation tools and programmes.

The measures adopted within the process have two main features: a strong integration of all stakeholders; the respect for local specificities and features as well as for the autonomy of schools in developing and implementing projects.

In compliance with a specific Ministerial Directive issued in June 2004, specific support task forces have been set up within each Regional Education Office. They implement actions aimed at promoting and supporting projects as well as monitoring and disseminating processes, products and outcomes.

The most important features in the process include: the selection and appointment of leader schools acting as reference points for other schools; the launching and coordination of thematic networks; the building up of inter-institutional links, in particular with Universities, local authorities and associations.