EU strategy for youth – investing and empowering

2009/2159(INI) - 23/03/2010

The Committee on Culture and Education unanimously adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Georgios PAPANIKOLAOU (EPP, EL) welcoming the Commission Communication on 'An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering'.

Key remarks about the effectiveness of the youth strategy: Members acknowledge that the reinforced Open Method of Coordination (OMC) with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity is an appropriate tool for cooperation on youth policy issues, despite its weaknesses, its restricted use, its legitimacy deficits, its lack of effective cooperation between 'experts' and elected politicians, a lack of proper integration with national priorities and the risk of 'responsibility confusion' between the various levels. In order to obtain long-term results, the Open Method of Coordination should be reinforced and be carried by a strong political will on the part of all those involved. The committee urges closer cooperation on youth issues between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council and stresses the need for more integrated cooperation with national parliaments within the scope of the OMC process.

Members stress the important role of the Comenius, Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programmes and reiterate their political priority of considering those programmes as a cornerstone in the development of the EU youth strategy, especially for the next generation of multiannual programmes. Members feel that, in mobility programmes, there must be sufficient scope for exchanges of young people outside formal education. They call on the Commission to devote special attention to the mobility of youth workers, and for the special visa regime which currently exists for students to be extended to youth workers.

The report acknowledges that improving young people's lives is a cross-cutting task which must be taken into account in every policy area. It encourages the creation of a youth sector in all departments that will help to strengthen the drafting of appropriate youth policies. The Commission is asked to appoint 'youth officers' in its directorates-general and to give them further training. The aim should be to assess Commission documents in the light of youth policy objectives. Report states that the mainstreaming of youth issues in all fields of policy is a key factor for the success of the youth strategy.

Fields of action: Members strongly stress that the global economic crisis is having a major impact on young people and that it should therefore profoundly influence priorities within the fields of action. This should be done by identifying a range of measures to back up the social exit strategy and special attention should be paid to the review of social safety nets and social security systems.

General principles applying to every field of action: Members underline the importance of eliminating all kinds of discrimination among young people, such as discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion, disability, age and sexual orientation. They also strongly underline the need to give young people with disabilities effective, tailor-made support as well as real and equal opportunities in physical, sensory and cognitive access to education, employment, culture, leisure, sports, social activities and involvement in the conduct of public and civil affairs.

Education and training: the report encourages Member States to intensify the interaction between the sides of the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation) as a key element for growth and job creation. It recommends promoting common criteria for stronger mutual recognition of non-formal education and vocational training, for example by speeding up the adoption of the EQF system for the recognition of qualifications, transparency and the validation of skills. Member States are also strongly

encouraged, in the context of increased funding, to promote learning and training mobility for all young people. The committee urges Member States to do their utmost to meet the strategic objectives and to reach the benchmarks fixed under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), particularly as regards low achievers in basic skills, and early school leavers.

Employment and entrepreneurship: the committee is extremely concerned about the increasing numbers of young people who are unemployed, under-employed or have no job security, especially in the current economic crisis. It strongly supports the invitation addressed to the European Council to ensure a youth perspective in the post-2010 Lisbon and Europe 2020 Strategies and to support the continuation of initiatives in line with the overall objectives of the European Youth Pact. It also supports the proposal to develop appropriate measures targeted at young people in the recovery plans drawn up in the economic and financial crisis plans. The committee suggests promoting an entrepreneurial culture among young people by improving communication on entrepreneurship, by supporting the development of European structures and networks to that end and by encouraging young people to become self-employed and to use microcredit and microfinance tools.

Health, well-being and environment: Members underline the need to take into account the specific vulnerability of young people and children when formulating consumer and environmental policies. They also underline the importance of further combating the use of drugs and alcohol and tobacco-related harm and other forms of addiction, including gambling, and emphasise the role of sport as a whole set of activities promoting healthy lifestyles for young people.

Participation: the committee strongly encourages promoting the participation of young people and youth organisations at all levels (local, national and international) in the formulation of general policies and, in particular, of youth policy and not only that, through ongoing structured dialogue. It recommends that the Commission consult representatives of national youth councils concerning the priority topics for young people.

Creativity and culture: the committee is surprised at the lack of any explicit reference to cultural issues in the Commission communication; adds that such issues cannot come down only to entrepreneurship and the use of new technologies. It also calls on the Commission and Council to devise a European youth pass so that young people can gain access to cultural institutions throughout the EU at a very low charge.

Voluntary activities: Members welcome the decision of the Council to designate 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering and they recommend the extension of the European Voluntary Service programme. They take the view that voluntary activities should not replace professional, paid employment opportunities but add value to society. The report calls for the introduction of a 'European Volunteer Pass' as an adjunct to the existing 'European You th Pass'. This pass would provide a record of the voluntary work performed by children and young people and could be submitted to potential employers as proof of a qualification.

Social inclusion: Members hold the view that, against the background of ageing societies, intergenerational equity is a key challenge. They stress also the need to develop more outreach programmes for marginalised groups, such as young immigrants and all those with special needs (the disabled, young people who need to be reintegrated into society after a period of imprisonment, homeless people, those in casual employment, etc.).

Youth and the world: the report is in favour of the fostering of general interest activities that create a sense of responsibility among young people, such as volunteering for climate change, for development or for humanitarian aid. It welcomes the opportunities that the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps will give young people and it encourages the Commission to further explore the possibility of enhancing international cooperation activities in youth volunteering.