EU strategy for youth – investing and empowering

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on 'An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering'.

Overall, Parliament welcomes the Commission Communication on the same subject (see COM(2009)0200) as well as the Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018). It takes the view that Community programmes and funds should reflect Europe's ambitions for young people and calls on the Member States to fully implement the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty in the area of youth policy, such as the encouragement of the participation of young people in democratic life, special attention to young sportsmen and sportswomen and the legal enforcement of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Key remarks about the effectiveness of the youth strategy: Parliament acknowledges that the reinforced Open Method of Coordination (OMC 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. Parliament 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. Parliament stresses the need to develop **clear and user-friendly indicators** both at European and national level which make it possible to improve, broaden and update knowledge of the condition of young people and to measure and compare progress on the implementation of commonly set objectives. It also points out the importance of an **evaluation of the state of implementation of the EU Strategy for Youth**.

Recalling the important role of the Comenius, Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, Parliament reiterates its **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. Parliament points out the need to mobilise and to adapt the EU programmes and social funds for youth, to facilitate access to them and to simplify the procedures for access. It stresses, in particular, how important it is to devise a practical, non-bureaucratic approach in this area.

Parliament considers that even more effort should be made to **promote the mobility of young people** within Europe and that, in mobility programmes, there must be sufficient scope for and attention devoted to exchanges of young people outside formal education. It calls 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.

Parliament 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.

Fields of action: Parliament stresses 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: Parliament underlines 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. It stresses the importance of considering young people as a **priority group in the EU's social vision**. It also strongly underlines the need to give young people with disabilities effective, tailor-made support. Everything must be done to identify cross-sectoral connections between youth policies and education, training, employment, culture and other policies, such as those relating to children.

Education and training: Parliament 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. Parliament strongly encourages Member States, in the context of increased funding, to promote learning and training mobility for all young people, which is a key factor for gaining learning and working experience.

With regard to the problem of **school drop-out**, Parliament calls for measures to be taken to ensure that as high a percentage of young people as possible complete their period of compulsory education. Member States are urged 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.

Parliament also calls on Member States to ensure that children and young people, irrespective of the legal status of their families, have a right to State education, helping them to achieve, with due respect for their own culture and language, the necessary command of the language of the host Member State and a knowledge of its culture as a tool for integration. Parliament asks Member States to ensure **equal access to education for all young people** irrespective of social origin and financial conditions.

Employment and entrepreneurship:Parliament 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. Parliament considers that job insecurity can discourage young people from starting a family or delay it, and thus giving rise to demographic changes. 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. Parliament also wants the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy to focus more on young people.

Member States are called upon to take action against job insecurity and poor working conditions and to **facilitate the access of young people to all kinds of employment** in good working conditions so as to avoid a mismatch between skills and jobs that represents a waste of talent. The quality of internships provided needs to be improved permitting young people to gain qualifications which lead to paid positions, as well as ensuring equal opportunities for young people in the periphery and in urban centres and special support to young mothers.

Recalling the risk of a **brain drain** and the negative consequences for young people's countries of origin, Parliament calls upon Member States to explore and develop youth retention strategies in countries and regions prone to outward migration. They are urged to i) eliminate the cases where a disparity in income

levels between young men and young women, ii) ensure decent employment rights and social security, and iii) guarantee the total transferability of acquired social benefits so as not to jeopardise welfare protection for young workers who have opted for mobility. Parliament also 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. Parliament also supports the need for synergy between the worlds of education and industry and for advanced forms of integration between universities and businesses.

Health, well-being and environment: Parliament underlines the need to take into account the specific vulnerability of young people and children when formulating consumer and environmental policies. Sustainable actions are required in this area. It calls on the Member States to include in their curricula appropriate forms of education on the prevention of health- and environment-related risks. It also underlines the need to take into account the specific vulnerability of young people and children when formulating consumer and environmental policies and stresses the need to ensure a high level of protection of young consumers through actions such as information and education campaigns. It highlights the importance of further combating the use of drugs and alcohol and tobacco-related harm and other forms of addiction, including gambling, and of taking measure to combat the exposure of young people to violent scenes in the media. The role of sport is emphasised as a whole set of activities promoting healthy lifestyles for young people. Parliament draws attention to the continuing high level of under-age pregnancies and calls on the Commission and the Member States to make young people aware of and educate them about this problem.

Participation: Parliament 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. Parliament underlines the importance of considering the method of youth consultation, so as to ensure that a broad range of views of young people are taken into account. It is in favour of the development of structures where all the actors can work together, equally influence policies and decisions and provide the means needed to create these structures. It stresses the need to involve more, and more diverse, young people, with a view to enhancing representativeness. It also supports encouraging participation from an early age. It also highlights the need for particular efforts to encourage young people living in peripheral and rural areas and in poor neighbourhoods to actively participate in European activities.

Creativity and culture: Parliament is surprised at the lack of any explicit reference to cultural issues in the Commission communication. It stresses the importance of supporting and recognising youth culture when the Member States allocate funds, as this is essential for developing young people's creativity. It welcomes the proposal included in the Council resolution to promote specialised training for youth workers in culture, new media and intercultural competences. 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**. Member States are urged to facilitate access to new technologies in order to boost young people's creativity and capacity for innovation and generate interest in culture, the arts and science.

Voluntary activities: Parliament takes the view that youth volunteering should be supported but that voluntary activities should not replace professional, paid employment opportunities but add value to society. It calls for the introduction and mutual recognition of a 'European Volunteer Pass' as an adjunct to the existing 'European Youth 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: Parliament holds the view that, against the background of ageing societies, intergenerational equity is a key challenge. It stresses 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.). It recommends that priority be given in each Member State to **ensuring that no young minors are denied access to social care**. It also calls for resolute action to be taken to combat all forms of extremism.

Youth and the world: Parliament recommends direct development aid to measures for the benefit of young people and to combat drug use and trafficking in developing countries. It favours fostering 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. It calls on the Member States to develop exchanges and twinning schemes with third countries and communities in order to promote intercultural dialogue and encourage young people to embark on common projects. Lastly, it calls for the improvement and extensive implementation of the Erasmus Mundus programme.