European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the Europe 2020 strategy

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution in response to the Commission communication entitled 'A new impetus for European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training to support the Europe 2020 strategy'.

The resolution notes that **the youth unemployment rate is now 21%**, which is twice as high as the general rate of unemployment at EU level and is one of the most pressing challenges in Europe, and is thus one of the goals being pursued to reduce the school drop-out rate below 10%. Another goal is to increase women's participation in the labour market by 70% by 2020. However, the Commission communication failed to take the gender dimension into account.

Parliament considers that **education and training are key factors for successful participation in the labour market** and the ability to make life decisions, given a situation where more than 5.5 million young Europeans are without work, are at risk of social exclusion and face poverty and a lack of opportunity after leaving school. The transition from education to work and between jobs is a structural challenge for workers all over the EU.

The resolution underlines that demography and longevity are such that working lives will, as a matter of course, be longer and more varied. Lifelong learning, education, the new digital economy, the adaptation to new technologies and the implementation of the EU 2020 goals are all ways to secure employment and a better standard of living.

Members consider that **vocational education and training tailored to learners' individual needs** is of decisive value, increasing the possibility for individuals to deal with competitive pressures, increasing the standard of living, and achieving socio-economic cohesion and better integration, in particular of specific groups such as migrants, people with disabilities, or early school-leavers and vulnerable women.

In this context, the role of the Member States and the Commission should be primarily to help create an environment where enterprises can succeed, develop and grow – to grow they need a reduced tax burden and predictability so they can plan and make investments. **Exchanges of best practices** are important in order to increase the number and improve the quality of pupils who opt for technical training in Member States, which fares poorly as far as pupil numbers and quality are concerned.

Recognising the importance of modernising vocational education and training as well as the importance of both initial and continuing vocational education, Parliament recommends, *inter alia*, the following:

- the Member States are called upon to make use of the positive experience with the dual system within **Vocational Educational and Training (VET)** in example countries, where the system has led to the longer-term integration of young workers into the labour market and to higher employment rates for young workers;
- **VET programmes should be extended** to comply with the principles of lifelong learning and initial and continuing training;
- the importance of encouraging **regular further training courses** as part of lifelong learning is stressed;
- the Member States are called upon to ensure that **vocational training and life-long-learning are geared more closely to the needs of the labour market** and allow for entry into and mobility

within it. There is a need for better and greater interaction between the world of education, work, vocational education and training as a vital link between the world of education and that of work;

- the Member States should establish and implement **quality assurance systems** at national level and develop a competence framework for teachers and trainers and the Commission is encouraged to develop and **update regularly a chart giving a region-by-region picture of training qualifications and demand**;
- the **link between education and training**, particularly the pathway from vocational to higher education, demands that the opportunities for link-ups between vocational training and university education be expanded, with special emphasis on integrating them into mechanisms for the provision of career information, guidance and counselling;
- the importance, at local and regional level, of fostering effective synergies and **reliable forms of cooperation between schools, training agencies, research centres and firms**, in order to overcome the inward-looking nature of education systems and the mismatch between knowledge and skills and the needs of the labour market and to make young people, in particular women, more employable is emphasised;
- better cooperation among the Member States' different education systems – bridging those differences and ensuring mutual recognition of certificates and diplomas among the Member States – should be emphasised in order to heighten cross-border collaboration and aid mobility;
- Parliament calls for a specific EU initiative to attract girls to the MINT (mathematics, informatics, natural sciences, and technology) professions and to **combat the stereotypes** that still dominate these professions;
- the Commission and the Member States are called upon to **render the European Social Fund management more flexible** bearing in mind the changing nature of the labour market;
- the Member States and the Commission are urged to **further improve the recognition of informal and non-formal learning**. Members point to best practices in this field, especially with ESF-funding, which prove that the recognition of skills, wherever they are learned, leads to more successful integration into the labour market.

lastly, the Member States are asked, as far as vocational education and training are concerned, to take into consideration the individual needs of low-skilled workers, migrant learners, people belonging to an ethnic minority, vulnerable women, the unemployed, people with disabilities and single mothers and at the same time that particular attention be paid to the **Roma minority**.