**Tibor Navracsics,** *Member of the Commission***.** – Madam President, first I wish to thank the Committee on Culture and Education and especially the rapporteur, Mrs Bocskor, for her excellent report, which follows up on the Joint Council and Commission report regarding the EU Youth Strategy. I would also like to thank all the participants for their very valuable remarks in that debate.

Thanks to the joint report, we defined our new shared priorities in the field of youth, which all contribute to the current top priorities of the EU. I am very pleased that the European Parliament is stressing the importance of the EU Youth Strategy. It is indeed an essential framework that has proved useful for Member States and for young people. The mid‑term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy conducted for the years 2010-2015 shows many positive impacts of European cooperation in the youth field.

With the EU Youth Strategy Work Plan for 2016‑2018 we have a focused cooperation agenda which deals with important issues: the need for increased social inclusion of all young people, stronger youth participation in democratic and civic life, and an easier transition of young people from youth to adulthood. Your report also stresses the importance of the structured dialogue with young people. I believe that this tool is very useful to engage with young people. For example, more than 67 000 young people participated in the consultation on the evaluation of youth policy cooperation in the EU launched during the summer.

However, there is room for improvement. To this end, I want to promote bottom‑up mechanisms, such as the one developed with my One Million outreach project and the New Narrative for Europe, where young people from a broader range of backgrounds make their voice heard and participate.

Your report focuses on investing in young people through the creation of quality and secure jobs, more mobility, more apprenticeship and a stronger focus on key competences such as digital skills and entrepreneurship. I particularly welcome the emphasis the report places on promoting civic education and a set of soft competences that will contribute to personal development and will ensure young people’s engagement in society, critical thinking and languages, for instance.

For this to happen, Europe has to optimise its education assistance and fully exploit all aspects of education, both formal and non-formal. Europe also needs to get better at linking the worlds of education and the job market. Cooperation with education and training providers is also an integral part of the Youth Guarantee. Schools’ central role in supporting its implementations stems from their ability to ensure that pupils make the most of the opportunities at school, signal where there is a risk of early exits, and provide support to students on professional pathways available to them.

We need to continue and step up our efforts to address youth unemployment. From the Commission’s side, we want to continue supporting Member States and particularly the hardest hit regions. That is why we have proposed to further boost the Youth Employment Initiative with EUR 1 billion for 2017‑2020, which should be matched by at least another EUR 1 billion from the European Social Fund. This will make it possible to support more young people after 2020 in Member States most affected by youth unemployment. National funding to boost youth unemployment also needs to be prioritised in Member States’ budgets, as the European structural and investment funds and the Youth Employment Initiative alone are not sufficient to overcome the problem.

Finally, your report rightly stresses the importance of supporting and recognising youth voluntary activities as a form of non-formal learning. The Commission could not agree more. This is why we are strengthening youth volunteering in all its forms, not least by launching the European Solidarity Corps in the very year of the twentieth anniversary of the European Voluntary Service. The Corps will allow even more young people in Europe to get this life experience and to make a valuable contribution to our society. We aim to have 100 000 young people signed up by 2020.

Let me end by once again thanking Parliament and the rapporteur for the very valuable input and strong support for our joint efforts in this field.