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DRAFT REPORT

on Rethinking Education
(2013/2041(INI))

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Rethinking Education

(2013/2041(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 20 November 2012 entitled ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’ (COM(2012)0669),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 28 November 2012 entitled ‘Annual Growth Survey 2013’ (COM(2012)0750),
- having regard to Council conclusions of 15 February 2013 on investing in education and training – a response to ‘Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’ and the 2013 Annual Growth Survey,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 23 November 2011 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing ‘ERASMUS For All’ – The Union programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport (COM(2011)0788 – C7-0436/2011 – 2011/0371(COD)),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 10 September 2012 on a Draft 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018) (COM(2012)0495), and the corresponding Commission staff working document (SWD(2012)0256),
- having regard to Council conclusions of 26 November 2012 on education and training in Europe 2020 – the contribution of education and training to economic recovery, growth and jobs¹,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 20 December 2011 entitled ‘Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe’ (COM(2011)0902),
- having regard to Commission Communication of 3 March 2010 on ‘Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training²,

¹ OJ C 70, 8.2.2012, p. 9.

² OJ C 135, 26.5.2010 p. 2.

- having regard to the Council Resolution of 28 November 2011 on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011/C 372/01)¹,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 1 December 2011 on tackling early school leaving³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2011 on early years learning in the European Union⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2011 on ‘Youth on the move – a framework for improving Europe’s education and training systems’⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 18 May 2010 on key competences for a changing world: implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of 18 December 2008 on delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation – implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme⁷,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A7-0000/2013),
- A. whereas one of the Europe 2020 headline targets is to reduce the share of early school-leavers to less than 10 % and to increase the share of the younger generation tertiary education degree or proper professional training to at least 40 %;
- B. whereas in March 2013, the unemployment rate among young people up to the age of 25 in the EU was 23.5 %, while at the same time more than 2 million vacancies could not be filled; whereas in several Member States, the duration of unemployment is increasing, and matching on the labour market is becoming less efficient;
- C. whereas the persisting economic crisis and austerity measures aimed at fiscal consolidation in several Member States challenge the lives of EU citizens in terms of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty;
- D. whereas accessible, flexible and high quality education and training have a crucial impact on the personal development of young people, also promoting their active citizenship and wellbeing;

¹ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 1.

² OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

³ OJ C 77 E, 16.3.2012, p. 27.

⁴ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 89.

⁵ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 77.

⁶ OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 8.

⁷ OJ C 45 E, 23.2.2010, p. 33.

- E. whereas it is necessary to examine closely future trends in labour market needs in order to adapt and modernise curricula and offer the right skills for the right jobs;

General observations

1. Welcomes the Commission Communication, in particular its strong focus on combating youth unemployment as well as promoting world-class vocational education and training (VET), flexible learning pathways and work-based learning, and addressing the shortages of well-qualified teachers and trainers;
2. Recalls that increased language competences contribute to fostering mobility and improving employability, and fully supports the Commission's proposal for a new EU benchmark on language competences according to which at least 50 % of 15-year olds should have knowledge of a first foreign language and at least 75 % should study a second foreign language by 2020;
3. Calls for a holistic approach to education and training, and highlights the important role of non-formal and informal learning as part of an overall lifelong learning strategy aiming at a socially inclusive knowledge society with strong individuals and active citizens;
4. Calls on the Member States to prioritise public expenditures in education, training, research and innovation, and recalls that any budget cut in these fields will have a strong negative impact on the economic recovery of the Union;

Youth – investment for future

5. Recalls that young people have great potential and a crucial role to play in achieving the Europe 2020 targets for education and employment; reminds the Member States of the close link between early school leaving, lack of employment-related skills and youth unemployment; also recalls that early childhood education and care lay the foundation for future learning and development of young people;
6. Calls for a recognition of youth and civil society organisations in the design and implementation of lifelong learning strategies; also highlights their role as complementary educational providers for non-formal and informal learning and volunteering, helping young people to attain both transversal skills and individual personal competences, such as critical thinking and problem solving, team work and communication, and self-confidence and leadership;
7. Urges the Member States to promote the attractiveness of VET, and calls for a stronger focus on transversal and basic skills, in particular on entrepreneurial and ICT skills that help young people to enter the labour market and to create their own businesses;
8. Stresses the need to focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects in education; however, also calls for the right balance between the acquirement of theoretical knowledge and practical skills during studies;
9. Highlights the importance of supporting young people, especially those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), by promoting traineeships and apprenticeships, dual

learning and work-based learning; considers these as valuable steps in the transition from education to professional life;

10. Urges the Member States to make full use of the European Youth Guarantee, and recalls that these types of temporary employment should act as stepping stones towards permanent work;

Strong focus on partnerships

11. Highlights that strong partnerships draw on synergies between financial and human resources and contribute to sharing the cost of lifelong learning which is particularly important in times of austerity, and recalls that partnerships also have a positive impact on education and training by contributing to improving their quality and accessibility;
12. Notes that the Communication does not specify any concrete implementation measures for cooperation between the educational sector and different social and business partners; however, welcomes the knowledge alliances and sector skills alliances included in the Commission proposal on the new multiannual programme in the field of education, training, youth, and sport;
13. Calls for more cooperation between educational institutions, the business sector, social partners, and regional authorities in order to exchange best practices and to promote partnerships as a means of transition from education to work;

Lifelong learning perspective

14. Notes the demographic changes within the Union, an ageing population and low birth rates, and consequently the need to acquire new skills and competences throughout life;
15. Encourages the Member States to promote cooperation and synergies in the field of lifelong learning, in particular to widen access to learning and to adapt and modernise the curricula of educational institutions in order to address the new challenges of the contemporary world;
16. Recalls the importance of high-quality teacher education that needs to be complemented with career-long professional training, due in particular to the rapid changes in ICT and digital media;
17. Stresses the need to mainstream gender equality, and calls for policies to attract vulnerable and disadvantaged groups into learning; in this context, encourages the Member States to introduce specific measures in the form of financial support to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
18. Strengthens the need to focus on low-skilled adults and intergenerational learning, and recalls the opportunities that digital learning and open educational resources (OER) can bring, as regards access to education and training;
19. Calls for breaking the prejudices that prevent students from taking such educational paths that are not necessarily perceived as leading to highly recognised careers and positions in

society;

20. Strongly supports the creation of a European area of skills and qualifications in order to achieve transparency and recognition of qualifications acquired in VET or higher education; where appropriate, proposes to extend the recognition also to qualifications gained outside of the formal education and training system;

* * *

21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Background

On the 20th of November 2012, the Commission presented its Communication entitled “Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes”. The document proposes concrete actions at the Union level and recommends initiatives at the national level in the following three main areas:

1. delivering the right skills for employment;
2. new ways of teaching and learning;
3. new approaches to funding and partnerships.

The Communication proposes to build the right skills for employment, improve basic literacy and numeracy as well as to strengthen transversal and entrepreneurial skills. It also emphasizes the need to develop partnerships in order to create the right skills strategies, and encourages debates on the funding of education.

The efficiency of teaching and learning can be enhanced through better recognition of skills and qualifications in Europe. This would foster mobility and help in reducing unemployment. The use of open educational resources and new technologies should be promoted to widen the access to learning materials and to increase the participation of students. Teachers need to have access to appropriate training to update their own skills.

The topics of the Communication are further developed in six other staff working documents. The Communication is also accompanied by the 2012 Education and Training Monitor, which gives substantial information related to the subject matter.

Rapporteur’s observations

In the current situation of economic turmoil both in Europe and worldwide, one of the biggest challenges is unemployment and people’s ability to ensure their livelihood. Combating unemployment has to be our primary objective, and this is where education and training have a crucial role to play. In the long term, education and skills development are keys to innovation and economic growth. However, high quality education that provides useful skills for the labour market needs has to go hand in hand with the development of personal competences and societal attitudes.

For the moment, educational institutions are struggling: almost every OECD country substantially increased spending on education between 1980 and 2005, yet only a few achieved significant improvements in performance. Systemic changes are needed to improve the quality of our educational institutions without imposing new burdens. Non-formal and informal learning and work in youth organisations should be better recognised and go alongside with the formal education. University-business partnerships and work-based

learning as well as better developed lifelong learning strategies can bring new incentives to boost the educational and training reform.

The Rapporteur highlights the urgent need to identify right skills for today's world – not only for students and young people entering the labour market but also for other people who need requalification in order to improve their personal situation, as regards employment, social inclusion, family life, active citizenship or self-recognition, for example. New competences and transversal skills acquired should lead to securing not only financial but also social and personal needs of the people.

Unemployment among young people up to the age of 25 in the EU reached 23,5% in March 2013. At the same time, there were more than 2 million vacancies that cannot be filled. The Rapporteur highlights that this problem is a clear result of the current situation where the needs of contemporary labour market are often in a mismatch with the opportunities provided by the education institutions. Some vacancies require skills that an insufficient number of young people have today. In addition, there is an urgent demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) educated people.

When addressing the issue of skills mismatches it is important to focus on the critical clash between students' perceptions of dream jobs and labour market needs for skilled and well-educated employees. Another problem lies in stereotypical perceptions of female and male educational pathways. However, bringing forward the added value of vocational education and training and shifting away from purely formal education will help to change these perceptions. Moreover, greater gender diversity at workplace and in team work in general has proven to lead to better performance and results.

The Rapporteur would like refer to the statistics provided by EU Skills Panorama¹ to highlight the following trends in Europe:

1. Increased numbers of high skilled jobs (such as legal advisors, senior officials and managers);
2. Falling share of skilled manual jobs (such as craft workers)
3. One out of three employees is either over or under qualified (which reflects the widespread skill mismatch);
4. Private sector recruitment responds faster and stronger to the business cycle as compared with the public sector;
5. Top bottleneck occupations can be found, for example, in the field of health (in particular medical doctors, pharmacologists and nurses), in the field of ICT (in particular IT consultants and software programmers), in the field of engineering (in particular specialised engineers) and in the field of finances (business professionals, e.g. accountants).

Non-formal and informal learning, work of youth organisations, good quality internships, apprenticeships and volunteering should be recognised as tools that create the first links between student lives and labour market and spread innovative spirit among young people. Furthermore, the work experience gained during studies helps young people to acquire the

¹ www.euskillspanorama.ec.europa.eu

necessary skills needed in the transition to employment. Individual personal competences such as critical thinking, team working, problem solving, communication, self-confidence, taking initiative and leadership are also necessary in order to be better prepared not only for professional but also for private life.

The Rapporteur would also like to urge the Member States to give funding for promoting work-based learning and dual learning models which are highly valuable in the transition from school to work. In addition, it is important to invest in both quality and standard, which need to be further developed.

Language skills are crucial as they foster mobility of workers and students, improving their employability and providing them with self-confidence at their workplace. Adequate language skills enable European citizens to fully seize professional opportunities abroad. The adoption of benchmarks is a necessary step towards better language skills in Europe. It will work as an incentive to improve learning outcomes of students and help towards accomplishing the Barcelona objective of “mother tongue + two foreign languages”.

The Rapporteur would like to focus on the following main objectives:

- Addressing the issue of youth unemployment – the above mentioned 23,5% of European young people;
- Updating education systems that are obsolete and creating a mismatch between opportunities provided by the education institutions and current labour market, and designing new systems to prevent the same situation from happening in the future, by using new teaching methods, involving social, regional and business partners in educational process, and lifelong learning pathways;
- Broadening the mission of education and training policies so that they have a specific role in promoting active citizenship, personal development and well-being, and enhancing structured social dialogue.

There are more and more young people outside education, employment or training (NEETs). The Union cannot afford any lost generation in future. The Rapporteur agrees with the Communication that the key tool to prevent this from happening is effective, accessible and quality education that matches with labour market needs. However, the Rapporteur wants to stress the fact that it is not only labour market needs that counts; also social inclusion and active citizenship must be addressed.

The Rapporteur urges the need to focus also on adult learning and lifelong learning programmes which help adults in acquiring requalification in order to apply for other positions during their working life. Moreover, education and training should be more accessible to vulnerable groups such as socially disadvantaged people, disabled people, minorities, older citizens and women, and should lead to enhancing their chances to live valuable lives.

The Rapporteur highlights that re-evaluating educational systems in Europe requires close cooperation: there is a need to enhance social dialogue between educational institutions and business sector, social partners, social services (labour offices), regional authorities or NGOs to exchange good practices and to promote partnerships as a means of transition from the world of education to the world of business or employment.

When modernising education and training policies, it is also important to increase civil society involvement and corporate social responsibility among the business community. In addition, business partners can play an important role when the students are acquiring new skills; they can be seen as examples or role models, and professionals can for example be involved in class-room activities.

The Rapporteur stresses that the main idea behind the report is not only to identify the main skills and challenges for learners and people entering the labour market but also to find solutions for how to maintain the precondition of their individual and economic independence. Every human being has the right to access education. If we want to make this a reality, we need to invest in quality education in a long-lasting and sustainable way. In addition, we need to use all complementary tools to increase opportunities for personal well-being and development, and this must be fully recognised both at the Union and the national level.