



Workshop for the Future WE ARE EUROPE!

A Workshop by and for Young People on Youth Unemployment, Europe's Economic Limitations and Challenges, Euroscepticism and Political Empowerment

Conclusions and Recommendations

1.0 Introduction

For young people in the southern countries of the eurozone, unemployment is an oppressive problem. Whereas (according to the most recent date of Eurostat) general unemployment in the EU amounts to 10.6% and youth unemployment to 22.9%; youth unemployment in Greece is a staggering 58,3%, with Spain (53,0%), Italy (42,3%) and Portugal 35,0% following not far behind. A whole generation is at risk of being left behind without any real perspective to lead a decent life, let alone build up a career. With the educational and health care system being severely hit by austerity measures, even the outlook for the next generation is worrying. Without a serious turn-around of the current crisis management and a new 'solidarity pact' between the north and the south, the young generation of the southern member states will be sacrificed and the European project will fail. The measures, which have been taken so far, are simply not enough to give youth a real perspective. What can young Europeans do to reclaim the European project and to reclaim their future?

1.1 Youth Unemployment

All over Europe, youth unemployment is perceived as a major problem, even though it differs from country to country. Whereas the highest unemployment rates among youth are to be found in the southern countries of the eurozone, even in Germany with its strong economy and a youth unemployment rate of 7,8%, youth unemployment is considered a problem for the whole society.

Recommendations

- **Non-selective and affordable educational systems** should be promoted throughout the EU accompanied by guaranteed access to higher education and funding of further education and training.
- **Internships** should be affordable for everyone. Legislation concerning this issue needs to be harmonised on EU level. A possible option would be the introduction of a common label to ensure the quality of traineeships. This common label would recognise as "fair traineeships" those which include social protection and remuneration.
- The **transition from education to work** has to be improved, for instance by better funded career service offices at universities that can help students make a smooth transition from study to job.
- The "**Bologna reforms**" were not successful in some EU countries, as they reduced the number of years of bachelors and masters programmes – contributing thus to a lack of skills in general and to the mismatch between skills required for the job market and skills acquired during the studies.
- The **Bachelor- and Master-system** needs to be revised. EU and national officials as well as national and European parliamentarians have to work together and find a better way of coordination.
- New and innovative **start-ups** by young citizens should be supported in order to enhance creativity in Europe.
- **Education** should become a priority in a **more social EU**.



1.2 Europe's Economic Limitations and Challenges

The introduction of the euro took place at a moment in which the key elements required in order to have a single currency were not yet established. The lack of a concrete fiscal integration and the lack of a common political orientation towards a union weakened the monetary union and can be considered one of the main causes of the current situation.

However, it is not recommendable to support proposals which promote the possibility of splitting the euro into two currencies, one for northern countries and another for the south. Therefore, the euro must be saved and maintained, though deep reforms and changes are called for in order to restore stability in the eurozone and trust towards the European Union in general.

Recommendations

- The role of the **European Central Bank** should be reviewed in such a way that not only price stability is considered a priority, but also the promotion of full employment. In this sense, a more active role of the ECB, in line with Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT), should be enforced in order to give countries the possibility of recovery without the speculative pressure of markets. As underlined by many Nobel Prize winning economists, in a period of crisis and recession, a massive expansive intervention is required in order to stimulate growth again.
- In the second paragraph of the Treaty of Maastricht it was written: "*the Community shall... promote throughout the Community a high degree of **convergence** of economic performance, a high level of employment and of social protection*". However, European economies were not converging before the crisis and, obviously, they are not converging today. Therefore, if we want to correct imbalances and injustices across Europe, we should promote further steps towards a federalist union.
- We need a thorough **re-structuring and boosting of the structural funds** leading towards a specific plan, something like a "Green Deal" in order to stimulate the recovery, create employment and increase welfare. This plan should be enforced with an assistance in strengthening administrative absorption capacity.
- Competition among Member States should be replaced by **cooperation**, especially for what concerns labour markets and wage levels. Mercantilist policies and wage dumping competitions could be substituted with a more cooperative strategy, given the common aim to make the single market sustainable and advantageous for all European countries.
- Finally, a **fair and common European social system** should be constructed in order to build a new identity for the European Union focussed on the well-being and equality of its citizens.

1.3 The Participation of Youth in the Political Decision Making Process

The word "youth" currently has a negative ring as it is mostly associated with unemployment. We would like to see "youth" in the discourse not treated as a problem but more as a challenge.

Recommendations

- **More education about Europe** is needed; therefore EU programmes such as Teachers for Europe, ERASMUS PLUS have to be intensified and expanded beyond university level.
- **More youth representation** should be introduced on all decision making levels starting from a very young age.



- Youth should not only be represented but also **included in the whole policy-making process** --especially on youth-related issues-- from consulting and planning to enforcement and assessment.
- Involvement of youth in politics should be promoted more strongly by politicians, for instance the **EU Structured Dialogue** should be made more visible to young citizens.
- A **database of European youth involvement projects** from local to European level should be created in order to organise and facilitate youth activities in a more coordinated way.
- **Youth budgets** in the Member States have to be safeguarded against austerity measures.
- Youth belonging to 'excluded' groups or 'at risk of exclusion' need **free civic spaces** for learning, leisure, internet access and debate. The EU can support local and national initiatives with know-how and financial resources.

1.4 How to Conquer Euroscepticism?

Eurosceptic parties are diverse and not as united in their views and ideologies as they seem at first sight. Firstly, they can be divided along a left-right axis and, secondly, according to the question to which extent they reject the EU as a whole or only parts of it.

Euroscepticism has developed a new dimension due to the crisis but also due to the discourse of the centre parties, such as chancellor Merkel's infamous statement on the crisis management as being "without alternatives".

Recommendations

- To put it clearly, alternatives are always present in a democracy which relies on arguments and reasoning. Therefore politicians on all levels have to **restore trust in the EU institutions** by giving room to discussions and alternative views. First and foremost this means **acting in a more accountable and transparent way** and thus to change the perception of an elitist and bureaucratic EU.
- **Other politicians should debate with their Eurosceptic opponents** and dismantle and confront their shortcomings and narrow-minded views rather than demonising them. Even more than on the European level, this is important on the domestic level.
- Another way to tackle Euroscepticism is to **enhance the civic and political education about the EU**. Explaining the structures and procedures is a core aspect to counter scepticism as it is the unknown which is always feared more than the known.
- In order to get through to citizens it would help if EU-decisions were communicated in a **more comprehensible** way and politicians showed a more **heart-felt commitment** to Europe.

Brussels, 7 May 2014

The workshop facilitators were: **Vasco Batista** (Portugal): **Youth unemployment**; **Armanda Cetrulo** (Italy): **Europe's Economic Limitations and Challenges**; **Stylia Kampani** (Greece): **The Participation of Youth in the Political Decision Making Process**; and **Julian Rappold** (Germany): **How to Conquer Euroscepticism?**

Not all recommendations and conclusions are necessarily shared by all participants.