



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 should be harmonised on EU level.
- The **transition from education to work** has to be improved, for instance by better funded career service offices at universities who help the 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 among 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, but 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** must be reviewed considerably and, in its priorities, the goal of employment should be added to price stability. Austerity measures should come to an end, since they have proved to worsen the crisis instead of solving it. 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.
- In this new context, countries with high level of trade surplus should start to invest in highly innovative and productive projects located in southern countries. A transparent and efficient **system of transfers of resources** from the north to the south should be implemented, with a strong attention to the destination of funds. In fact, it can represent a virtuous system, which could determine, on the one side, the recovery in southern Europe and, on the other side, increase the aggregate demand at European level, determining also positive externalities for northern countries.
- Competition among Member States should be substituted by **cooperation**, especially for what concerns the labour markets and wage levels. In this sense, northern countries should not compete on the labour cost, but instead they should start to think about some sort of wage standard, or at least they should not create wage dumping.
- Finally, a **truly integrated social system** should be constructed in order to build a new identity for the European Union, which should be oriented on the well-being and equality of their 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**.
- **More education about Europe** is needed; therefore EU programmes such as Teachers for Europe, ERASMUS and LEONARDO DA VINCI 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 assessing.

- 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.
- Another way to tackle Euroscepticism is to **enhance the civic and political education on 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.
- **Communicating the EU-decisions** in a more comprehensible way and more often sending out more positive and emotionally-involved messages.
- **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.

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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.