



EDUC-024

OPINION

By the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

‘Youth on the Move’

Rapporteur: Horst Günther Klitzing

EN

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The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

- welcomes the fact that, following the green paper COM (2009)329/4, the Commission has now compiled the communication ‘Youth on the Move’ and was able to use it publicly to acknowledge some details made in opinions on the green paper,
- sees within the communication a decisive move in the direction of the strategic goal that is ‘Europe 2020’.

The problems mentioned in the communication and persisting obstacles which stand in the way of objectives being achieved are comprehensible, but they are often caused by other things than those mentioned by the Commission and thus will not be overcome via the far-reaching appellative form of a communication to the Member States, especially as the EU subsidiarity principle also sets clear limits in this field.

It is comprehensible that the Commission

- views the current level of youth unemployment as unacceptable and sees a need to take action to remedy the problem,
- considers a lack of skilled labour to be something which impedes a lasting stable and competitive economy,
- thinks that the high number of people dropping out of school is dangerous with regard to social peace and an individually satisfactory professional life, and sees alongside this the economic cost,
- assesses the results of the international school performance comparative studies as proof of the deficit in national education systems, given that too few young people are attaining key skills.

CESI considers the four focal points mentioned as the crux of the initiative to overcome the problems as fundamentally insufficient with regard to the Commission’s ambitious aims, since there is a lack of possibility to take direct action in the Member States and industry can be lukewarm about administrative targets. The economic structures characterised by globalisation impose restrictions which are just as clear as those posed by the interests of the different nation states. Furthermore, many initiatives have, in the past fallen victim to the individual interests and needs of EU citizens, who all behave in different ways and do not take decisions based on the rational consideration of statistics and European economic policy



strategies, in an effort to approximate the plans of what remains, for many people, a very distant Commission in Brussels.

However, the detail of the focal points is not entirely coherent, either.

Regarding 2.

- CESI underscores the observation that *'there is a need for better targeted, sustained and enhanced levels of investment in education and training'*. The very issue of staying focused on whether budget funds are being used in an effective manner and constantly monitoring these levels of effectiveness seems to be lacking everywhere. CESI also calls for a greater amount of pressure to be placed on the Member States to devote more state expenditure to education and aim to match the performance of the world's leading industrialised nations more quickly than they have managed so far.
- Reducing early school leaving to 10% by 2020 is an extraordinarily ambitious target, and a response to a major social policy concern in all Member States. The target should be adhered to as a call to the Member States to tackle the issue with renewed energy and vigour, but it should not be restricted to schools. It is a well-known fact that school failure in the group arguably dubbed 'underachievers' is, to a considerable extent, dependent on factors unconnected to the school. The announcement that there will be a Commission recommendation on strengthening early childhood education and care is a positive step, in CESI's view.
- Even if the statement that certain *'key competences for the knowledge economy and society'*, as they are defined in the text, something which is being awarded ever greater currency, is nothing new, but was unfortunately too rarely made a cornerstone of education and teaching plans hitherto, it remains true. We can also agree with the comments on modernising professional and further training, workplace experience and apprenticeships.
- However, CESI has misgivings about the accusation, made once again, that European education systems *'have been slow to respond to the requirements of the knowledge society, failing to adapt curricula and programmes to the changing needs of the labour market'*. As right as it may be that schools and higher educational establishments should prepare their pupils and students for the world of work ahead, their task is, and remains, primarily to instruct and to educate, and both of these include more than professional training: above all, they aim to teach learners about other human beings and equip them with the skills to live in a democratic social state. These skills include self-determination, codetermination and solidarity.

Regarding 3.



- CESI can go along with most of the comments in this section. We particularly welcome the observation that *‘existing international rankings can give an incomplete picture of the performance of universities, over-emphasising research, while excluding other key factors that make universities successful, such as teaching quality, innovation, regional involvement and internationalisation’*.
- However, what is questionable is the claim, clearly made on the basis of economic figures, that some of the best European universities - does this not apply to all universities? - *‘are hampered in realising their full potential’*. If this were really to be the case, surely it would have more to do with structural and systematic reasons than those related to a lack of economic action. Tradition has it that it remains the primary concern of the state to finance its universities, in order to guarantee research and teaching freedom. Even in future, locating additional sources of income ought to be seen as an addition and not become the core task of the universities.
- A further significant question concerns to what extent and why, in the Commission’s view, universities ought to continue to develop or modernise and what costs are involved. Research, above all the necessary basic research, can only occur freely and without appropriation. The thought of research bound only to industry perverts the task of a state institution.
- If, however, a further development/reform to the Bologna process were to be considered, CESI would offer its full support, in order, at least in part, to reverse the path from the classical university with its unity of research and teaching towards a higher learning institution concerned primarily with training students for professions.
- Finally, the recently recorded demand for 40% of university graduates should be rejected for its desire to lump everyone together. This figure should already been queried from a nation state perspective, since the European statistics are not specific enough and thus reveal little. Which equally important qualifications are subsumed by this, for example? Unlike the target of only 10% of early school leavers by 2020, figures about academic qualifications must be geared towards the different educational structures in the Member States. Besides, fixating on the number of university qualifications is too economic.
Furthermore, it seems appropriate not to view the OECD data as the only reliable figures, but rather to ask for continuous monitoring by the Member States with the mandatory further development of monitoring instruments and indicators.

Regarding 4.

4.1.



CESI can agree with the remarks made here.

However, its assessment of the acceptance and appraisal of worker mobility by employers is significantly less optimistic than in the communication. To date, there has never been such unrestricted access to this in the academic field.

It should also be appreciated that aid to promote mobility such as the European Qualifications Framework and the derived national frameworks do not degenerate into unusable bureaucratic monsters which cause the opposite of the purpose for which they were intended, i.e. helping to make things more transparent and comparable.

4.2.

As desirable as a greater level of employment mobility may be, particularly with respect to creating a common European identity, the targets seem unrealistic.

It is already difficult to improve levels of mobility in the individual states: this tends to be something which occurs not in answer to an appeal, but rather because the economic situation calls for it. We can therefore imagine, how much harder it is to promote something like this across Europe. In CESI's view, citizens tend to wish to be mobile in their own country, at best to neighbouring areas, and the view tends to be: "I don't apply for a job in the place where I go on holiday".

Regarding 5.

5.1.

Here, CESI had identified a worrisome interference in the two sides of industry's sovereignty in wage bargaining. Here, too, the problem of the current labour market with fixed-term contracts and mini-employment with regard to individual problems on the part of the workers is only superficially represented, not to mention the cost of this development to the national economy.

5.2.

The question arises as to whether there are '*public employment services*' in all Member States, which could provide a support system.



To summarise, we can observe that

- There is a recognisable will on the part of the Commission to work with greater vigour to promote the potential of young people in times of sinking birth rates,
- The Communication throws up important questions and indicates steps in the right direction towards answering them,
- There is nevertheless no mention of cost or financing,
- Focusing on gaining key competences is not enough to meet the needs of the labour market; here the text fails to mention that one needs real capacities and proficiencies, to succeed in the labour market – no mobility without quality! -,
- As a whole, the regularity of ‘talking things up’ and euphemistic adjectives is very irritating. They make the success of the initiative seem like it’s ‘in the bag’, where a little restraint would be more appropriate.