

RETHINK EUROPE - CREATE THE EUROPE OF TOMORROW TOGETHER

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YOUNG EUROPEANS: WHAT'S NEXT, ERASMUS

I would like to thank the honouring opportunity to speak in front you

Talking about young people, **education and training** are highly placed on our agenda as we believe at the CoR that "Talents and Skills are the Future *for* Europe". Not so long ago, back in February this year, we debated with **Commissioner Navracsics** in the CoR plenary and reached the conclusion that "education is the best safety net against social exclusion".

We need to spend more on education, and spend wisely so to ensure strategic investment in education and training.

This makes the "**New Skills Agenda for Europe**" especially relevant. We already discussed our draft Opinion¹ on the Commission package (rapporteur: **Marie-Louise Rönnmark** (SE/PES)), focusing on renewed efforts to **modernise the European education systems**, to achieve **excellence** and to stimulate **innovation** in this policy fields.

At the CoR we believe the New Skills Agenda should tackle the **skills gap** in Europe covering the **whole spectrum of skills needs**, from basic to complex skills, and from transversal to sector-specific.

That is why we support in principle Commission's proposal for a Skills Guarantee aimed at improving employment opportunities and full participation in society for **low-skilled adults** in Europe. And the package should specify **clear goals** and set out the **conditions** that low-skilled adults must meet. These matters have considerable implications for **local and regional levels of government**, given both their role in society and their responsibility for education.

Our debate today is particularly timely and relevant as we have to confront immediate challenges such as the **integration of young refugees** or the rise in **extremism among young people**. These concerns cannot be tackled alone and call for a comprehensive and pedagogic effort from the society as a whole, while we should be aware that only robust investments in training could bring about citizens fully empowered to play the right role in our societies.

¹

COR-2016-04094-00-00-PA-TRA

At the same time, we need to better **forecast the skills** needed by the labour market, including at local and regional level, and thus close the gap between the supply and demand in this field. It is also crucial to nurture the **entrepreneurial spirit** among young people, to embed digital technologies and develop **e-skills** to face what is called the Digital Turn.

There is a dire need for **continuous training and innovation**, for constantly reinventing the teaching and learning processes. So I am convinced that education systems (and curricular requirements) will have to be reorganised to promote greater use of **modern technical aids for learning, teaching, testing and assessing**.

However, the **Erasmus+ programme and the Youth Guarantee** are essential tools for achieving strategic objectives, the problems are far more complex and EU action in the area of youth affairs already goes beyond these two effective tools which, though seemingly effective, are actually insufficient, given that the Youth Guarantee is still not being properly applied².

That's why we highly welcome the European Commission's intentions for the Youth initiative as mentioned in the State of the Union speech, namely fight against **youth unemployment**, modernizing schools and higher education, Roll-out Youth Guarantee and mobility actions. This problem was also highlighted in the Bratislava Declaration last week, as an objective to provide better opportunities for youth. We also welcome the plan of EU support for Member States in fighting youth unemployment and on enhanced EU programmes dedicated to youth.

² COR-2015-4872

Figures on Erasmus + (2014-2020)³:

- Combines 7 EU education, training and youth programmes, and introduces sport for the first time;
- Total budget of €14.7 billion, representing a 40% budget increase,
- EU grants and training for about 4 million people and 125,000 institutions
- €2,110,000,000 funding per year (89,2% for education and training; 10% for youth, 1,8% for sport and 5,3% for other)
- In the first year of Erasmus+ 650 000 people studied, trained or volunteered abroad
- 1987/88 – 2013/14 3.3 million people participated in the Erasmus programme
- 1 out of 3 young Erasmus Plus students got offered jobs by the companies they trained in.

Local and regional authorities, in their role as education providers can support and should be involved in developing talents and skills in various fields and promote the European idea as well.

As we all know, the **Brexit experience** shows that Euroscepticism is at its highest level and that the EU is perceived as being too distant by its citizens. And there is an important aspect for young people as well.

The low levels of participation in the European elections and in the UK referendum, as well as the current lack of interest and engagement of young people in EU affairs and politics are signs that the EU must be rethought and trust rebuilt.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

As citizens view local and regional authorities as the most accessible level of government, the EU needs to reinforce its decentralized communication policy. We need to go local if we want our messages to be heard by our citizens.

Being the EU's political assembly of local and regional representatives, the CoR can play a crucial role in communicating with young people and bridging the gap between the EU and its territories.

The CoR is taking this issue seriously, while trying to promote Eurooptimism and new ways to communication about Europe. Our efforts echo what President Juncker said in his State of the Union speech last week: "we need to invest in our young people."

Let me give you a few concrete examples of the work we are doing: The 2016 edition of the **European Conference on Public Communication** offers a unique platform to share expertise and ideas on how to communicate on European issues by focusing on questions such as: Does Europe still inspire people? What new ways might be found to [re]connect with EU citizens?

It will showcase successful good practices developed by the **European Entrepreneurial Regions** to boost young entrepreneurship, identify the support that regional and local actors need from the EU, and explore how regions and cities can better promote entrepreneurial mind-sets and business creation among young people.

To close the gap between European young people and the EU, CoR is engaged in several activities towards youth in Europe. We regularly organise visits for school students, trainees of different organisations and university students coming from all over Europe. In 2015, and despite the negative impact of the terrorist attacks, the CoR received 14,499 visitors in 552 groups.

Through its open online course (**MOOC**), the CoR attracts younger people's attention and fosters the debate on European issues. The current MOOC on 'EU budget and funding for regions and cities' will be provided – between 31 October and 9 December 2016 – via an online learning platform through videos, live debates, factsheets and quizzes. More than 1,600 participants already registered, and the latest figures indicate that the majority of them are between 25 and 35 years of age.

The CoR also offers paid traineeship opportunities to young Europeans who have completed at least the first cycle of a higher education course (Bachelor) and obtained a full degree. Each year, the CoR receives around 4,000 applications, for a total of 20 trainee positions offered throughout the institution.

We directly encourage our trainees to engage towards other young people in Europe through the '**[Y] Factor**', a youth event organized twice a year by the CoR trainees, in collaboration with the CoR services. The main idea behind [Y] Factor is to tackle the topics and issues that concern young people at local and regional level. The third [Y] Factor Conference was organised on January 27, 2016 focused on the role of youth in local and regional innovation. General recommendations:

- Enhance cross-border public procurement

- Increase collaboration at local and regional level, and encourage the exchange of best practice
- Create more community-based platforms that enhance public-private collaboration on big data
- Harmonise the procedures for launching new businesses within the EU
- Help companies in finding their customers through grants, education programmes, and networks of local authorities
- Encourage the creation of Vibrant Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.

The latest [Y] Factor Conference was organised on 08-09 July 2016 during the Bratislava Summit. This event marks an important milestone in accomplishing the CoR's first priority "A fresh start for the European economy". Youth unemployment can be solved by enhancing the connections between people, between places and between resources.

We need to be innovative and moreover to learn from each other. Europe should remain **open to cooperation and collaboration** within and with its partners.

Thank you for your attention!