

# Youth of tomorrow

Spending on youth is not a cost but an investment in the future, writes **Milan Zver**

Last year the EU committed itself to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It will only be able to entirely fulfil this commitment, if the investments into education and generally into various sectors of youth policies will be increased. But we should not forget that the main responsibility lies with the member states.

Many were initially sceptical. It soon turned out that youth on the move is not unduly one of the seven leading initiatives of the EU development programme. Compared with the Lisbon strategy it is not only more realistic, but its focus is mainly on basic development questions, which, in contrast with the previous strategy, pays much more attention to young people, education and employment – topics with development potential.

We did not want the youth on the move report, which has a dual nature, since it includes employment and education, to be prepared for the youth, but with the youth. That is why we included many of their ideas when preparing the first draft. I was positively surprised that young people were thinking responsibly about their future. They discussed how to narrow the gap between the production of the educational systems and the needs of labour market or society and how to increase young people employability.

They were critical of national school systems' slow modernisation, causing great difficulties to find a first job and recognition of skills acquired abroad. But they were also worried that the EU, together with its member states, would not provide greater investments in youth related programmes.

In the context of lifelong learning there are quite a few successful sub-programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci. Together with the only youth programme, youth in action, these programmes provide educational and occupational mobility among young people across the EU. Various youth projects in the EU are also being financed from the social fund.

We all know that with educational mobility, employment mobility and also some informal

forms of mobility, such as youth tourism, we do not only strengthen the European dimension in the minds of young people, but also indirectly modernise educational systems and arrange the labour market, which during the crisis shut the door to young people even more. In just two years the number of young people without a job increased from four to five million.

I think we should follow the goal, emphasised by commission president José Manuel Barroso, that till the end of this decade all young people should have the opportunity to participate in employment or learning mobility abroad. I also believe that the budget money for education and youth policy should not be understood as a cost, but as an investment in the future which reliably ensures far reaching positive effects.

The EU has set itself ambitious goals, including 40 per cent of young people with higher education, and lowering the number of early school leavers below 10 per cent. We should also strengthen the Barcelona process, which ensures the formation of a European higher education area. Otherwise the EU will not be able to compete globally.

The old lady, in terms of demographic, must realise, before setting budget guidelines and parameters for the next financial perspective that without greater investment in the above mentioned policies there will be neither development nor welfare. The only real development resource that Europe has is its citizens and their creative potential. ★

Milan Zver is parliament's rapporteur for the youth on the move initiative



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