

II

(Preparatory Acts)

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Opinion on the Council proposal establishing a third joint programme to encourage the exchange of young workers within the Community ⁽¹⁾

(85/C 25/01)

On 5 June 1984 the Council of the European Communities decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 235 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Social Questions which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 8 November 1984 in the light of the report by Mr Löw. Mr Dassis and Mr De Bruyn acted as co-rapporteurs.

At its 221st plenary session held on 21 and 22 November 1984 (meeting of 21 November 1984), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following opinion.

1. The aims and the expansion of the programme

1.1. The Economic and Social Committee broadly endorses the proposal for a Council Decision establishing a third joint programme to encourage the exchange of young workers within the Community. In its opinion on the first and second programmes, the Committee repeatedly emphasized the value of such programmes, particularly with respect to the goals set by the Commission, viz. to further the vocational knowledge of young workers, to heighten their awareness of the problems in the working world, to establish contacts with occupational circles in the host country, to improve young workers' knowledge of the living conditions and industrial relations in the host country and to encourage adequate information as to the aims and the functioning of the Community.

1.2. Experience with the first, and particularly the second programme were positive. As a result the number of participants rose from 256 in 1979 to approximately 1 200 in 1983, despite the limited financial resources available; these positive experiences provide sufficient justification for continuing and expanding the programmes, even though a number of implementation problems remain to be solved.

1.3. The Committee is convinced that the third programme can also make a valuable contribution to preparing young people for working life, by giving them the chance (a) to acquire further vocational skills through practical job experience and (b) to familiarize themselves with the life-style and customs of the host country.

1.4. The Committee would recall that one of the original main aims of the programme was to create a

(1) OJ No C 153, 13. 6. 1984, p. 5.

European awareness particularly amongst the youth of Europe, as a step towards gradual integration. This aspect should receive now more attention than ever.

1.5. Against this background and in view of the high level of youth unemployment in many Member States, the Committee also broadly welcomes the Commission proposal that the third programme should encompass young people who are registered as job-seekers and who have acquired a basic vocational training or practical work experience.

1.6. Participation in an exchange programme can help to boost these young people's prospects of being integrated or reintegrated into the world of work. The number of applicants for previous programmes has however always far outstripped the Commission's financial resources. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that the inclusion of young job-seekers in the third programme does not raise expectations which cannot be fulfilled.

2. The financing of the programme

2.1. In its second report to the Council on the progress of the second programme (COM(84) 255 final), the Commission refers to estimates that the total costs for projects proposed by the responsible authorities for 1984 will be three times the sum at the Commission's disposal. Since the Community budget will, in the foreseeable future, continue to be one of the main sources for financing the programme, the success of the expanded third programme might be jeopardized by the tightness of budgetary resources.

2.2. The Committee therefore believes it to be imperative that the available resources be distributed efficiently. In view of the redistribution of the ESF's tasks, it recommends investigating the scope for assigning ESF resources to the programme.

At any rate, particularly in view of the rising costs per participant, the overall resources should be pitched higher than originally proposed. Consideration should also be given to a contribution by the Member States, particularly in respect of exchanges of unemployed young people, since their employment prospects are enhanced by such programmes.

2.3. The Committee also welcomes all other measures to simplify the programme's administration which cut costs without jeopardizing the proper implementation of the programme.

3. Involvement of the associations

The Committee is pleased that the competent associations are to be involved more directly. This will cut financial and administrative costs. The Committee sets great store on the continued appropriate involvement of the trade organizations and the social partners.

4. Long-term and short-term training sources

4.1. The Committee endorses in principle the proposed experimental expansion of short training courses. It points out that short-term courses have outnumbered long-term courses since 1982. The Committee reiterates the position expressed in its opinion on the second programme, that exchanges involving a short stay in the host country must also have a high vocational training content.

4.2. The Committee stresses that the expansion of short-term courses must not ignore the importance of long-term courses. Given their specific job-related content, long-term courses are more suitable than short-term courses for enhancing and expanding young people's vocational skills. This is particularly important for young job-seekers since many of them are inadequately trained and qualified and have therefore only slim prospects of finding suitable employment.

4.3. The Committee attaches particular importance to the promotion of exchange projects in economic sectors involving new technology, and information technology in particular. It welcomes the Council proposal to provide additional incentives for specific forward-looking exchange projects which take account of the development of the new technologies.

4.4. The Committee is pleased that participants in short programmes are to be provided with language training. At any rate such language training should be provided before the exchange takes place, in order to make the short stay in the host country worthwhile and not to curtail it even more. Prior language training in the country of origin should as far as possible be regarded as the norm in exchanges. A good language course in the country of origin, geared to the specific needs of participants, is the best way of ensuring an interesting and rewarding stay in the host country.

5. Geographical distribution

5.1. The lopsided geographical distribution of the exchange projects has still not been solved. This is illustrated by the Commission reports to the Council on the progress of exchange programmes for young workers within the Community.

5.2. Greater incentives for training in the lesser-used Community languages could make a considerable contribution here.

5.3. The Committee welcomes the proposal to gear travel cost grants to distance. This will be instrumen-

tal in involving the peripheral areas of the Community more closely in the programmes.

6. Social protection

6.1. The Committee has always taken the view that all participants in exchange programmes must be provided with adequate social protection. The third programme's proposals for this area may however create problems. Given the national legislation governing this area, special problems may be created by the proposal to treat young job-seekers as young persons enrolled in vocational training or other training courses in their country of origin.

Done at Brussels, 21 November 1984.

The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee
Gerd MUHR

Opinion on the communication from the Commission to the Council on action to combat long-term unemployment (85/C 25/02)

On 2 October 1984 the Council of the European Communities requested the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to deliver an opinion on the abovementioned document.

The Section for Social Question (rapporteur: Mr Noordwal; corapporteurs: Mr Beretta and Mr Roseingrave), which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on this matter, adopted its opinion on 8 November 1984.

The Committee unanimously adopted its opinion at its 221st plenary session held on 21 and 22 November 1984 (meeting of 21 November 1984).

1. General comments

1.1. In view of the very tight deadline set for this opinion, the Committee will confine itself to some, mainly general, comments on key aspects of long-term unemployment.

1.2. The scale and serious implications of this problem have been highlighted repeatedly in many earlier opinions⁽¹⁾. Consequently, the Committee can-

⁽¹⁾ See in particular the opinion on social developments in the Community in 1982 — Rapporteur: Mr Noordwal (OJ No C 286, 24. 10. 1983).