

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee 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 — An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union’**

COM(2010) 477 final

(2011/C 132/10)

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On 15 September 2010, the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 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 (An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union)*

COM(2010) 477 final.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 24 February 2011.

At its 470th plenary session, held on 15 and 16 March 2011 (meeting of 15 March 2011), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

## 1. Summary of recommendations

1.1 The EESC is aware of the need to focus on young people who are seriously affected by the current economic crisis. It recognises the utility of the Youth on the Move initiative as an integral part of the Europe 2020 measures, and welcomes the overall provisions set out in the communication. The EESC is ready to contribute to their implementation by joining forces and heightening the initiative's profile with the social partners and civil society organisations and by identifying existing gaps in the initiative which are covered by the EU Youth Strategy.

1.2 The EESC stresses that the objectives proposed by the Youth on the Move initiative should be monitored, and the progress of implementation should be measured using clear indicators, so that the Member States can step up their efforts if these objectives are not met in time.

1.3 At a time when the economic crisis has forced a review of budgetary priorities, the EESC stresses the importance of maintaining and increasing, wherever possible, the effective use of resources assigned at national and EU level to the education and training and employment of young people. Economic recovery policies must encourage the creation of stable jobs and prevent any interruption of studies.

1.4 The EESC supports the creation of a quality framework for traineeships and applauds the measures geared towards removing legal and administrative obstacles to the free movement of young people for education, traineeships and apprenticeships.

1.5 The EESC welcomes the Commission's initiative to enhance the validation of non-formal learning and increase the visibility of skills acquired outside the formal education system (such as through the European Skills Passport). Discussion on ways of validation should also focus on the quality of the education and training provided and its supervision and monitoring. At the same time, the EESC reminds that everyone should benefit from measures which enhance non-formal learning, which therefore should not be limited to young people with fewer opportunities only.

1.6 The EESC welcomes the development of instruments at national level, such as the Youth Guarantee, which help young people to move from education to the labour market. However, the EESC is of the view that some of the other initiatives need to be examined further before they are implemented. This is the case for the comparison of higher education results, developing a Youth on the Move Card, establishing a 'Your first EURES job' initiative and working on the future of the European Progress Micro-Finance Facility.

1.7 The EESC backs the Commission's efforts to identify the most effective ways of supporting youth employment. These include training programmes, security measures and benefits combined with activation, recruitment subsidies and suitable wage and social security arrangements, as well as career guidance. The EESC stresses that these steps must be undertaken by using and enhancing social dialogue and dialogue with civil society.

1.8 The initiative does indeed highlight education and employment, but it does not place sufficient emphasis on developing social capital and youth participation in European civil society. Furthermore, inclusive growth should also be included as a matter of priority in strategies for young people, and the necessary means for implementation should be introduced, such as maintaining and strengthening the existing Youth in Action programme.

1.9 The EESC regrets that activities which strengthen and build up the social and civic dimension of youth in Europe were omitted from the initiative. The title 'Youth on the Move' should be reflected in the communication as being not only 'about' or 'for' youth, but rather 'with' youth, denoting the active participation of young people in implementing the proposed actions. The EESC asks the Commission to add the necessary activities to the initiative.

1.10 The EESC suggests that a new package of information on the special website of the initiative be included in existing sources of information such as the PLOTEUS, YOUTH and other existing portals. Integrating new information into existing websites might be more successful and help young people to access it more easily.

1.11 Traineeships should be made more attractive, should reflect the interests of everyone concerned and the Member States should, through different types of incentives, encourage employers to create more traineeship opportunities and subsequently more and better jobs for young people.

1.12 The EESC welcomes the importance given to the use of the European Social Fund (ESF). When negotiating with the Member States on the budgetary provisions within the new financial perspective, the Commission should particularly focus on whether or not there are sufficient funds for ESF initiatives, in particular for those which are youth-related.

1.13 The EESC will look closely at the potential contribution of the European system of student loans in accordance with the possibilities and instruments already available.

## 2. Gist of the Commission initiative

2.1 The Europe 2020 Strategy sets ambitious objectives for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth in the EU. Young people are key players in achieving this. Quality education and training for all, successful and sustained labour market integration, decent, and adequately paid work, and opportunities for greater mobility are essential elements in '**unleashing the potential of all young people**'<sup>(1)</sup> and thus achieving the objectives of the 2020 strategy. As a result, the set of measures in the **Youth on the Move** initiative makes it one of the strategy's flagship proposals.

2.2 Youth on the Move aims to strengthen the objectives and priorities which define the strategic framework for European cooperation on education and training (Education and training 2020) and to implement measures in order to achieve the following goals:

- improve the prospects for young people to successfully enter and remain in the labour market;
- give more young people access to higher education;
- adapt education and vocational training so that they match the needs of young people more closely;
- ensure that, by 2020, every European citizen can study or train abroad if they so wish;
- reduce youth unemployment, increasing the number of jobs accessible to young people, as well as company traineeships for students and work experience that fosters an entrepreneurial spirit in the student;
- provide more and better information about EU instruments which support mobility, particularly courses, training or traineeships abroad, etc.

2.3 For each of the priority areas, a series of **key new actions** has been drawn up. They comprise proposals which are designed to contribute specifically to achieving these priorities.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2010) 477 final.

### 3. General comments from the Committee on the Commission Communication

3.1 The flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move' is in line with the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It underlines the new holistic approach, seeing policy on youth education and employment as being closely related to other flagship initiatives and the five EU level headline targets. The EESC stresses the need for coherence between the EU level and national policies and for non-governmental stakeholders to play a key role.

3.2 The EESC would like to stress that the initiative should be regarded in the context of the greatest economic crisis that Europe has faced in years. This cannot be disregarded, given that the stated aim is to '*unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*'. It is pertinent to ask how the crisis is affecting job security, social rights and all the plans and projects for student and labour mobility at present. The EESC deems it important to highlight the links that exist between economy-oriented measures being adopted and the impact that these might have on existing European plans and programmes which are of great value to young people. Any cuts should be avoided. On the contrary, available resources should be better targeted and possibly increased significantly.

3.3 The EESC recognises the value of the Youth on the Move initiative as an integral part of the Europe 2020 measures, and welcomes the overall provisions set out in the communication. The initiative should, first and foremost, interconnect more effectively the various existing and future measures and projects in order to improve the opportunities for reaching the goals mentioned above. The EESC regrets that activities which strengthen and build up the social and civic dimension of youth in Europe were omitted in the initiative. The title 'Youth on the Move' should be reflected in the communication being not only 'about' or 'for' youth, but rather 'with' youth, noting the active participation of young people in implementing the proposed actions. The EESC asks the Commission to add the necessary activities to the initiative.

3.4 As the initiative covers two main areas, education and employment, the EESC appreciates the fact that it emphasises mobility, attractiveness and quality, thus tying it in with the European strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020 (ET 2020), in particular with strategic objectives 1 and 2. It is important that this initiative places particular emphasis on greater learning mobility, modernising higher education, enhancing and validating informal and non-formal learning and guaranteeing effective, lasting investment in education and vocational training.

3.5 The EESC also welcomes the fact that the initiative highlights the links between the objectives and the continued implementation of the European qualifications framework, more open education systems, improved guidance and partnership

between educational bodies and employers<sup>(2)</sup>. In the implementation of this initiative, the EESC recommends focusing mainly on opening up and adapting education systems to the needs of society and the labour market, by effectively integrating the Youth on the Move initiative with the existing instruments for learning mobility such as Europass and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and enhancing cooperation between educational institutions and employers, as well as trade unions, students and other stakeholders.

3.6 The initiative does indeed highlight education and employment, but it does not place sufficient emphasis on developing social capital and promoting youth in European civil society. In this regard, the Youth on the Move initiative does not sufficiently match the objectives of the new EU Youth Strategy, 'Investing and Empowering' adopted in 2009, nor of the Lisbon Treaty (Article 165(2)) which strengthens the citizenship dimension and the need to encourage young people to participate in democratic life, and those activities aimed at young people. Key skills relating directly to the business world (such as innovation and entrepreneurial spirit), education on citizenship, solidarity and consolidating social cohesion – i.e. the full involvement of young people across the social agenda – have to be included and the support measures necessary have to be designed and added to the initiative.

3.7 Furthermore, inclusive growth should also be included as a matter of priority in strategies designed for young people, and the necessary means for their implementation should be introduced, such as maintaining and strengthening the existing Youth in Action programme.

3.8 Some aspects relating to non-discrimination should be incorporated more clearly in the initiative. The EESC suggests including measures which address the problem of the wage gap between young men and women. Differences between locals and people with a migrant background and their difficulties in achieving equal conditions and qualifications need to be addressed. The inclusion in the job market of disadvantaged young people should also receive proper attention.

3.9 The objectives proposed in the initiative should be monitored, and the progress of implementation should be measured using clear indicators, so that the Member States can step up their efforts if these objectives are not met in time.

3.10 In the following section, the EESC examines the priority areas established by the communication and sets out its comments and additional information for each of the new key actions proposed.

<sup>(2)</sup> This concept should be understood, in its broadest sense, to mean anyone employing someone else and in all sectors – private, public or non-governmental.

#### 4. Developing modern education and training systems to deliver key competences and excellence

##### 4.1 Propose a draft Council recommendation on combating early school leaving (2010)

4.1.1 Reducing early school leaving is a particularly important issue, for some Member States in particular. It is also one of the key objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and derives directly from the set of benchmarks in the Education and training 2020 strategic framework. At a time when the economic crisis has caused cuts in budgets, the EESC stresses the importance of maintaining and increasing, wherever possible, those resources assigned at national level which are designed to prevent early school leaving.

##### 4.2 Launch a High Level Expert Group on Literacy (2010)

4.2.1 The EESC supports methods which have been proven effective in improving the abilities of schoolchildren and students and in eradicating illiteracy in the EU. Moreover, it stresses the importance of programmes which involve young people from socially disadvantaged and migrant backgrounds. It is important that the High Level Expert Group provide opportunities for dialogue and consultation with the social partners and civil society organisations.

##### 4.3 Boost the attractiveness, provision and quality of vocational education and training

4.3.1 Following consultations with Cedefop, the EESC flags up the necessity for a re-examination of our education, training and learning strategies – including vocational education and training (VET). There is a need for:

- more targeted education and training,
- to promote and value a broader range of knowledge, skills and competences,
- to reduce knowledge and skills mismatch,
- to support new learning environments,
- to open up education and training structures and institutions
- to take individual needs into account.

4.3.2 The EESC therefore welcomes the Bruges Communiqué, which aims to enhance European cooperation in VET, which defines 11 long-term strategic objectives for the next decade (2011-2020). The EESC supports improving

the quality of vocational training at EU level. VET should be one of the first new target areas to benefit from greater mobility.

##### 4.4 Propose a quality framework for traineeships

4.4.1 The EESC applauds measures which remove legal and administrative obstacles to the free movement of young people for traineeships. Structured dialogue with young people has identified another key problem: the quality of traineeships in each Member State. The European framework should therefore initiate a national debate on traineeships, apprenticeships and the quality of job contracts offered to young people. Traineeships should form a part of education curricula and incorporate a strong educational element, which enables young people to obtain stable, high-quality, adequately paid, non-discriminatory jobs thereafter.

4.4.2 The requirement of a quality framework for traineeships should apply to all forms of learning in a real work environment, regardless of whether or not these fall within formal education programmes or are carried out voluntarily outside any formal teaching framework. Traineeships should not be a replacement for jobs *per se* but, should offer trainees the skills needed for a smooth transition to the professional world. Young trainees should receive financial compensation for any real professional assignments and should also be covered by social security. For these traineeships to be efficient and relevant in the labour market, it is important that the **social partners** be involved in their design, organisation, delivery and funding.

4.4.3 Traineeships should be made more attractive, should reflect the interests of everyone concerned and the Member States should, through different types of incentives, encourage employers to create more traineeship opportunities and subsequently more and better jobs for young people, taking into account 'The Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets' adopted by the European social partners.

##### 4.5 Propose a draft Council Recommendation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning (2011)

4.5.1 The EESC has long considered this issue to be of major significance, and therefore supports additional measures in this regard. The EESC particularly welcomes the strong emphasis on validating non-formal learning outcomes. The discussion on ways in which validation may be carried out should also focus on the quality of non-formal education, its supervision and monitoring. Everyone should benefit from measures which enhance non-formal learning and therefore it should not be limited solely to disadvantaged young people (as indicated in the Communication). Non-formal learning provided mainly by NGOs through voluntary activities, is important as a way in which young people can build up the skills necessary in today's world, particularly with regard to creativity, teamwork, problem-solving, language skills, multicultural awareness, empathy, and a sense of initiative and responsibility.

4.5.2 With regard to the validation of informal learning; employers will play a key role in its gaining acceptance, and the role of both vocational and higher educational institutions will be crucial.

4.5.3 With regard to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, a number of good practices already exist at national level, such as the 'Profipass' in Germany and the 'Keys for life' in the Czech Republic. These should be taken into account when the Council Recommendation is drafted. The Commission should contribute to the multiplication and analysis of good practices and take into account the wide variation in development, traditions and realities across the EU.

## 5. Promoting the attractiveness of higher education for the knowledge economy

5.1 *Support the reform and modernisation of higher education, by presenting a Communication (2011), which will set out a new enhanced agenda for higher education*

5.1.1 Higher education reform should play a much more significant role in the achievement of the 2020 Strategy objectives which seek to make EU society the leader in knowledge, innovation and development. The modernisation of systems of tertiary education – realisation of the European Higher Education Area and the objectives of the Bologna process, greater involvement of civil society and the private sector, reviewing and strengthening of quality assurance systems in higher education and recognition of the importance of the social dimension in education should help young graduates succeed in accessing the labour market and remove the barriers of equal participation in education that still exist in relation to social inequalities, gender, nationality, etc.

### 5.2 *Comparison of higher education results*

5.2.1 Whilst one of the aims is to define benchmarks in order to gauge the results and achievements of higher education, the EESC stresses the importance of carefully selecting criteria in close cooperation with education experts, civil society organisations and the private sector, as this is a very sensitive area. The EESC shares concerns about the potential extrapolation of assessment or classification methods used in other fields and doubts if creating a new multidimensional university ranking system or scale is an EU competence.

### 5.3 *Propose a multiannual Strategic Innovation Agenda (2011)*

5.3.1 With regard to the Strategic Innovation Agenda (2011), the EESC refers the Commission to the numerous opinions and recommendations from the recent years covering this topic (3).

(3) EESC opinions on 'Reviewing Community innovation policy in a changing world', OJ C 354 of 28.12.2010, p.80, and 'Investment in Knowledge and Innovation (Lisbon Strategy)', OJ C 256 of 27.10.2007, p. 17.

## 6. Supporting strong development of transnational learning and employment mobility for young people

6.1 *Set up a dedicated Youth on the Move website for information on EU learning and mobility opportunities (2010)*

6.1.1 The EESC proposes that a new package of information be included within existing sources such as the PLOTEUS, YOUTH and other existing portals, as integrating new information into existing websites might be more successful and make it easier for young people to access it. A unified database with vacancies for traineeships and voluntary work should also be developed and included in those websites.

6.2 *Propose a draft Council Recommendation on promoting the learning mobility of young people (2010)*

6.2.1 The EESC supports strengthening specific measures which aim to achieve greater learning mobility, and implementing the conclusions of the public consultations regarding the proposals of the Green Paper on *Promoting the learning mobility of young people*. It played an active part in this in 2009 and made several valuable recommendations (4). Support measures before, during and after mobility should be provided.

6.3 *Develop a Youth on the Move card*

6.3.1 The initiative is not sufficiently clear about whether or not it aims to develop a new card or give fresh impetus to the existing Youth 26 Card. The added value of any new card must be clearly identified and compared with the existing ones.

6.4 *Publish guidance on the European Court of Justice rulings on the rights of mobile students (2010)*

6.4.1 The EESC believes this to be a positive measure, and points out that the rulings should be published using flexible, easily accessible, understandable formats. Secondary school students must also find them user-friendly.

6.5 *Propose a European Skills Passport (2011)*

6.5.1 The EESC supports the creation of a European Skills Passport. It believes that the existing passports (Europass and the youth passport) should be combined into one overall instrument that would cover, on a single form, a traditional CV, formal education (Europass) and non-formal or informal education. Young people remain unconvinced about the large number of instruments constantly under review, and which ultimately remain not very efficient. The success of the

(4) EESC opinion on the 'Green Paper — Promoting the learning mobility of young people'. OJ C 255 of 22.9.2010, p. 81.

European Skills Passport will depend, amongst other factors, on how it is viewed by employers and used by young people, for whom the necessary advisory and support measures must remain available.

#### 6.6 Implement the initiative 'Your first EURES job'

6.6.1 The EESC welcomes any form of support which boosts young people's employment prospects. The EESC believes that strengthening EURES and other portals and improving their quality of service can help in this respect.

#### 6.7 Create, during 2010, a European Vacancy Monitor

6.7.1 The EESC welcomes the regular publication of the European Vacancy Monitor, as it provides a valuable and up-to-date overview of developments on the European job market.

#### 6.8 Monitor the application of EU legislation on workers' freedom of movement

6.8.1 The EESC agrees in principle that the application of EU legislation on the free movement of workers benefits young people and should be monitored more carefully (this measure has been in place for some time). However, the Commission does not state clearly how the monitoring of legislation and application of initiatives for young people on the move will be organised.

### 7. A framework for youth employment

#### 7.1 Identify the most effective measures of supporting youth employment

7.1.1 Youth unemployment, which was already alarming before the crisis, has now become one of the most worrying aspects of the European labour market. As the initiative states, **Youth unemployment is unacceptably high at almost 21 %. In order to reach the 75 % employment target for the population aged 20-64 years, the transition of young people to the labour market needs to be radically improved<sup>(5)</sup>.** The significance of measures that help to guarantee young people high-quality, permanent, and adequately paid employment from the outset can not be underestimated. The EESC welcomes the proposed initiatives and invites the Commission to obtain solid commitments from the Member States – in consensus with the social partners and other stakeholders – to create jobs for young people. The EESC also endorses the statement in the text that

**'Wage arrangements and non-wage labour costs can provide an incentive to employ new entrants, but should not contribute to precariousness. Collective bargaining can also play a positive role in setting agreed differentiated entry wages'**, whilst observing the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equivalent value.

7.1.2 Tackling the situation of young people in today's labour markets is a key element in enhancing Europe's competitiveness. To be successful, we ultimately need to ensure that the talents of today's younger generations are better utilised and not wasted.

7.1.3 The EESC backs efforts to identify the most effective measures of supporting youth employment, such as training programmes, security measures and benefits combined with activation, recruitment subsidies and suitable wage and social security arrangements. The Commission also rightly places emphasis on career guidance. When young people have to decide on their future career, they should receive the necessary information on the various education options open to them, a clear idea of the skills and competences needed and information on possible developments in the job market in order to plan their future accordingly. This is particularly the case when preparing for and searching for a first job.

#### 7.2 Establish systematic monitoring of the situation of young people not in employment, education or training

7.2.1 Another consequence of the current crisis is the increasing number of young people not in employment, education or training. However, until now it has been difficult to gain an overall idea of how serious this phenomenon is at EU level and the impact on the mental health and well-being of young people. The EESC therefore welcomes the proposal to set up systematic monitoring in this area.

#### 7.3 Establish, with the support of the PROGRESS programme, a new Mutual Learning Programme for European Public Employment Services (2010)

7.3.1 The EESC endorses this action and recommends that it be geared above all to unifying existing activities, funding and exchanges of experience. It is crucial to have efficient, relevant public employment services. However, in certain Member States, private agencies are responsible for these services: some are insufficiently regulated and monitored. It is vital to offer stable, high-quality, work, and to ensure social rights. In this, as in other areas, the contribution of the social partners is of crucial importance.

<sup>(5)</sup> According to the Eurostat report for January 2011, the overall unemployment rate in the EU-27 was 9,6 %. Youth unemployment, (covering under-25s) stood at 21 %. The countries with the highest youth unemployment were Spain (43,6 %), Slovakia (36,6 %) and Lithuania (35,2 %).

#### 7.4 *Step up bilateral and regional policy dialogue on youth employment with the EU's strategic partners*

7.4.1 The EESC is in favour of stepping up bilateral and multilateral cooperation with organisations such as the OECD and the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans and in the context of EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean and other parts of the world with which cooperation could be envisaged. This applies particularly to issues regarding young people with migrant backgrounds.

#### 7.5 *Encourage young entrepreneurs to make greater use of the European Progress Micro-Finance Facility*

7.5.1 The EESC welcomes the micro-finance facility as a new way of fostering entrepreneurial spirit and of creating new jobs in micro-enterprises<sup>(6)</sup>. However, although there were no plans to extend the instrument as part of the EU's new financial perspectives post-2013, the EESC believes that an extension should be considered if proof of its merit is provided.

7.5.2 The structured dialogue currently underway with young people shows that young people who decide to start their own businesses require special support in two areas that have to be taken into account: i) the necessary start-up capital, and ii) coaching, mentoring and help with practical issues.

#### 7.6 *Propose that all young people are in a job, further education or activation measures within four months of leaving school and providing this as a 'Youth Guarantee'*

7.6.1 The EESC welcomes the idea of developing an instrument at national level that could help young people to overcome the obstacles involved in moving from education to the labour market. The positive experiences of some Member States should be shared as an example. In the long term, the proposed 'youth guarantee' could make a key contribution to the European social model and the Europe 2020 objectives.

#### 7.7 *Guarantee a good balance between rights to benefits and targeted activation measures based upon mutual obligation*

7.7.1 The EESC supports the mutual obligation measure, including activation policies for young people at risk of social exclusion, and modernising the social protection system, etc. It

also endorses strengthening the activation and motivation functions of welfare systems, in order to prevent young people from becoming dependent on social benefits for too long.

#### 7.8 *In segmented labour markets, introduce an open-ended 'single contract' with a sufficiently long probation period and a gradual increase of protection rights*

7.8.1 The concept of the open-ended single contract might be one of the measures which could contribute to a reduction in inequalities between those joining the labour market and those excluded from it. The EESC is aware of the significant differences existing between Member States with regard to young people's entry into the labour market. Some of the more rigid systems prevent young people from getting a job at all; in others there are more offers for short term contracts which are too flexible and which do not offer full access to social benefits. The EESC stresses that the measures to be adopted must aim to secure stable contracts offers for youngsters that avoid any discrimination based on age, gender or any other grounds.

### 8. **Exploiting the full potential of EU funding programmes**

#### 8.1 *Better showcase the assistance that the ESF can bring to young people, and fully tap into its potential*

8.1.1 The EESC welcomes the importance that the communication gives to the use of the European Social Fund (ESF). When negotiating with the Member States on the budget division within the new financial perspective, the EC should particularly focus on whether or not there are sufficient funds for ESF initiatives, especially the ones related to youth. Strengthening the youth dimension in other programmes should be explored.

#### 8.2 *Ensure that the Fund benefits young people in the immediate future and is used swiftly to reach the Europe 2020 objectives*

8.2.1 The EESC believes that efforts should be made to make exhaustive use of the current possibilities offered by the ESF but other funds should also include the goals mentioned above as horizontal priorities.

#### 8.3 *Undertake a review of all EU programmes fostering learning mobility and education in this area*

8.3.1 The EESC endorses the proposal to organise public consultations in order to monitor the contribution of mobility to learning. It will pay close attention to activities in this field, bearing in mind the new financial perspectives.

<sup>(6)</sup> EESC opinion on 'Investment in Knowledge and Innovation (Lisbon Strategy)', OJ C 256 of 27.10.2007, p. 17-26.

8.3.2 The Commission communication does not refer to the role played by European learning programmes in supporting active citizenship and the involvement of young people. It is clear that quality education and a solid labour market contribute to growth in Europe, but they should be accompanied by instruments promoting youth participation in society, so that young people take 'ownership' of and responsibility for relevant policies. Youth workers and youth organisations can play a stronger role here. Possibilities for civic voluntary activities should be widened.

8.3.3 The EESC believes that the anti-crisis measures should not mean that support for non-formal learning is sidetracked, for its role is gaining in significance and is already a decisive factor in the future and development of young people.

8.4 *Examine the feasibility of a European system of student loans to increase their cross-border mobility*

8.4.1 The EESC will look closely at the potential contribution of this action with regard to the possibilities and instruments already available. Evaluation reports of the mobility programmes shows that the main barrier for increasing mobility is student financing; however, to effectively support the goal for mobility – 20 % by year 2020 – the accessibility and size of grants should be prioritised. The procedure for granting loans needs to be carefully drawn up, and young people informed of it, as it is important to prevent them, as far as possible, from becoming trapped in a spiral of debt.

Brussels, 15 March 2011.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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