

**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 — Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes’**

COM(2012) 669 final

(2013/C 327/12)

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On 20 November 2012, the European 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 - Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*

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The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 26 June 2013.

At its 491st plenary session, held on 10 and 11 July 2013 (meeting of 10 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 154 votes with 3 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC broadly welcomes the Commission's initiative, especially its efforts to combat youth unemployment, but believes that the contents of the communication do not match the ambition expressed in the title "Rethinking Education".

1.2 The current economic and social crisis is imposing constraints on the budgetary decisions of the countries of the European Union, especially those subject to fiscal adjustment programmes - a situation that is exacerbated by the reduction in the EU's own budget. The Committee warns that the cuts being applied to education budgets are in danger of turning initiatives and proposals that are deemed necessary into mere statements of good intent.

1.3 Aware that there are significant shortcomings in education systems that need to be tackled, and that problems in linking schools and employment need to be remedied, the EESC wishes to recommend:

that the European institutions

1.3.1 review the current mechanisms for collecting, presenting and interpreting data on education and training to ensure that they are transparent and comparable;

1.3.2 also review the current European educational processes and the different instruments already in place and especially that the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESGQA) be revised;

1.3.3 implement the measures now being proposed, incorporating them into other initiatives aimed at integrating young people into the labour market, in particular the Youth on the Move action plan for employment and entrepreneurship;

1.3.4 ensure that the forthcoming EU budget provides the necessary funds for the entire programme, particularly for the recently-approved Youth Employment Initiative.

that the Member States

1.3.5 carry out a review and/or forward-looking update of policies related to employment and high-quality public services, in the belief that to fully achieve the objectives set for education, investment in this sector must go hand in hand with labour-related, social and economic policies supporting sustainable growth and prosperity, ensuring that the social partners and other civil society organisations are fully involved in this process;

1.3.6 encourage the incorporation into education policies and programmes of the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills which, besides what is learned at school, could be supplemented, where appropriate, with workplace learning and by fostering business involvement in schemes promoted by schools;

1.3.7 encourage the introduction into schools of dual systems of education and training that combine classroom learning with workplace experience, raising awareness among education authorities and businesses of the importance of such initiatives;

1.3.8 review as a matter of urgency the links between vocational education and training and employment, in order to gain a better understanding of possible shortcomings and to design vocational training that actually meets labour market needs;

1.3.9 ensure that the conditions for everyone to engage in ongoing learning and for improving training (advanced courses and retraining) are met, showing due regard for the right to high-quality lifelong learning;

1.3.10 recognise and value non-formal learning in a creative and innovative way, raising the visibility of skills acquired outside the formal system and fostering complementarity between non-formal and formal learning, while at the same time promoting equal opportunities;

1.3.11 adopt common rules and principles for defining quality criteria for systems that will guarantee the recognition and validation of non-formal learning;

1.3.12 invest in training and hiring good teachers, improving their academic and professional training, striving to ensure gender balance in teacher recruitment, and providing suitable work, pay and career conditions in order to make teaching more attractive to younger generations;

1.3.13 view education and training budgets as investments in the future and as an ongoing necessity in order to be able to meet the obligation to ensure high-quality and relevant education for all, avoiding cuts that make this obligation harder to meet;

1.3.14 All stakeholders (including youth and community organisations, schools and teachers, parents and guardians, businesses and unions) should be involved in framing and monitoring educational policies and identifying potential problems and should also be involved in educating, training and integrating young people into society, providing clear goals, regular assessments and sufficient resources to ensure that these are sustainable.

that the social partners

1.3.15 take responsibility and properly implement the Framework of Action on Youth Employment adopted under their joint work programme for 2012-2014, focussing on the link between education, young people's expectations and labour market needs, while taking account of young people's transition from school to the labour market, with a view to increasing employment rates in general.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 Education often takes centre-stage in the EESC's discussions and the Committee therefore welcomes the Commission Communication's statement that "investment in

education and training is key to increasing productivity and economic growth" <sup>(1)</sup>. The Committee also shares the document's concern at the major changes taking place in Europe's labour markets, which demonstrate the need to reshape educational systems, in order to remedy any failings or shortcomings that they may have.

2.2 The EESC has issued a large number of opinions contributing to the recognition of education as a fundamental human right <sup>(2)</sup>, in which the Committee makes it clear that the main purpose of education remains to teach people to be free, critical and independent individuals who are able to contribute to the development of the society in which they live and understand that they share values and culture.

2.3 The Committee is convinced that as part of teacher training, attention should be given to modern communication skills, which should help make school life relevant and interesting <sup>(3)</sup>.

2.4 The EESC also agrees with the urgent need for consistent and transversal political responses to a number of key issues: Europe's early school-leaving rate, which remains high, the low participation of workers in lifelong learning, the millions of people who still have low levels of education, the lack of sufficient reading skills in children under the age of 15 and mass youth unemployment in some EU countries.

2.5 The Committee fears, however, that the value of the initiatives proposed in the communication is being lost in light of the reality facing European countries in crisis. Budget cuts, especially in the resources earmarked for education and training can make it harder to remedy students' unequal starting points and to promote high-quality education for all <sup>(4)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2012) 669 final.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 161, 06.06.2013, p. 67-72; OJ C 161, 06.05.2013, p. 27-34; OJ C 11, 15.01.2013, p. 8-15; OJ C 299, 04.10.2012, p. 97; OJ C 191, 29.06.2012, p. 103; OJ C 76, 14.03.2013, p. 1; OJ C 181, 21.06.2012, p. 154; OJ C 143, 22.05.2012, p. 94; OJ C 181, 21.06.2012, p. 143; OJ C 68, 06.03.2012, p. 11; OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 50; OJ C 68, 06.03.2012, p. 1; OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 142; OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 1; OJ C 132, 03.05.2011, p. 55; OJ C 21, 21.01.2011, p. 66; OJ C 255, 22.09.2010, p. 81; OJ C 318, 23.12.2009, p. 113; OJ C 128, 18.05.2010, p. 10; OJ C 224, 30.08.2008, p. 100; OJ C 204, 09.08.2008, p. 95; OJ C 151, 17.06.2008, p. 45; OJ C 218, 11.09.2009, p. 85; OJ C 151, 17.06.2008, p. 41.

<sup>(3)</sup> Survey of Schools: ICT in Education (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/node/51275>).

<sup>(4)</sup> As well as criticising the faltering progress towards the Education for All (EFA) goals, the 2012 monitoring report on UNESCO's EFA initiative concludes that if they are to deliver results for citizens, education systems must be built on sufficient and sustainable funding. The OECD has noted in recent statements, however, that having public education focused on quality and equality is the best choice for governments, in terms of both saving money and making a sound investment. Communities and disadvantaged people should be involved, however, because only then will a high-quality educational system be possible (Education International - OECD Conference on "Quality and dialogue key to public education", 4 February 2013).

2.6 Although responsibility for education falls to the Member States, the European Union also has an important role to play, through its open method of coordination among the various education ministers, through European-level data collection mechanisms and through various European educational initiatives such as the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, the Bruges Communiqué, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance ESGQA <sup>(5)</sup>.

2.7 The concern expressed by broad swathes of civil society at the mismatch between the skills held by young people today and the requirements of business and at the difficult transition between school and work or between unemployment and employment are relevant and should consequently be addressed. The EESC therefore particularly welcomes the Commission's decision to further develop sharing between the spheres of education and employment, promote joint initiatives and measures to smooth the transition from school to work, lower barriers to mobility in the EU, decisively improve the workings of the labour market and guarantee equal opportunities. The EESC urges the Commission and the Member States to pursue this approach, while upholding the European social model and strengthening social cohesion.

2.8 The EESC welcomes the new Framework of Action on Youth Employment, developed by the social partners, as an essential part of their joint work programme for 2012-2014, presented for the first time at the Tripartite Social Summit on 14 March 2013.

### 3. General comments

3.1 The Committee is pleased to note that the Commission pays particular attention to combating youth unemployment in four key areas: high-quality education and training, the inclusion of practical work-based learning, the inclusion of apprenticeships and dual learning models and the promotion of partnerships in order to achieve a common goal.

3.2 The title of the Communication suggests an ambition that is not matched by its content, probably because the Commission wanted to focus its work on a single goal. The Committee believes that the document could have gone further, however, and could have addressed such pressing issues/challenges as the current demographic situation in Europe, energy

and migration, which would require far more complex responses. Similarly, account should in future be taken of other studies such as those produced recently by the United Nations and UNESCO <sup>(6)</sup>.

3.3 As far as the Commission proposal is concerned, the Committee warns against treating education as nothing more than a tool for developing solely work-related skills and for increasing employability <sup>(7)</sup>. The Committee reiterates its conviction that employability depends not only on the acquisition of basic skills and practical experience, but also on qualities and mindsets such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being. Thus, although employability can be regarded as a goal to work towards as part of the process of re-evaluating education, it should not be interpreted too narrowly.

3.4 The Committee points out that if investment in education is to fully achieve its goals, it must go hand in hand with labour-related, social and economic policies, with a view to supporting sustainable growth and prosperity. The Committee has previously recommended that the EU and the Member States, especially against the backdrop of the crisis, carry out a review and/or forward-looking update of policies related to employment and high-quality public services, focussing more on specific groups (children, adults with special needs, migrants, etc.), and that all of these policies incorporate the gender dimension and the full participation of civil society organisations <sup>(8)</sup>.

3.5 The recognition that there is a mismatch between the skills required by the labour market and those generally held by young people and workers makes it even more urgent to link school and work in order to address this disparity. It is also clear, however, that school hours and working hours are not and cannot be the same.

3.6 The EESC welcomes the recent decision of the European Council to launch a Youth Guarantee, aimed at ensuring access for everyone under the age of 25 to good work opportunities, ongoing education or a traineeship within four months of completing education or becoming unemployed.

<sup>(6)</sup> At UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 12/14 February 2013, twelve international education experts embarked on a critical review of the most important reports on education produced by the organisation in the twentieth century - *Learning to Be*, by Edgar Faure (1972) and Jacques Delors' report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996) - in light of the most recent and far-reaching social changes [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org).

<sup>(7)</sup> The terms "employability" and "job creation" do not mean the same thing or express the same concept. While "job creation" is a complex phenomenon involving responsibilities shared between the State, employers and workers and requiring social dialogue and negotiation, "employability" appears to refer almost exclusively to the individual responsibility of the jobseeker.

<sup>(8)</sup> OJ C 18, 19.1.2011, p. 18.

<sup>(5)</sup> All of the acronyms refer to the English titles.

3.7 The Committee would point out, however, that the current levels of unemployment affect not only young people but also older workers. Use should, therefore, be made of the know-how of these older workers, not only to help young people find work but also to pass on knowledge gained from a wide variety of experiences.

3.8 The EESC regrets that the Commission has failed to seize the opportunity offered by this communication to recognise the role that non-formal education can play as a supplement to formal education and draws attention to the call made by participants at the Strasbourg Symposium for a common long- and medium-term process to be established to recognise non-formal education in Europe <sup>(9)</sup>.

#### 4. Specific comments

##### 4.1 Basic and transversal skills

4.1.1 The EESC shares the Commission's view that "efforts need to be concentrated on developing transversal skills, particularly entrepreneurial skills" but considers that the first step must be that foundation or basic skills are achieved by all. The Committee also agrees that language learning should continue to receive particular attention. The fact is that a young person who has acquired sound basic, cross-cutting skills (such as teamworking, mastering several languages, knowing how to use IT tools, being able to form and express opinions, taking part in decision-making, etc.) will probably experience less difficulty in entering the labour market and succeeding in the business world.

4.1.2 "Entrepreneurial skills" are certainly an important element, provided that they do not aim solely to create businesses. Without an entrepreneurial attitude, one can achieve little in life, especially in such hard times. Incorporating these skills into educational policies and programmes is therefore to be welcomed.

4.1.3 To develop the entrepreneurial spirit, and going beyond curriculum-related issues, the possibility of taking part in workplace learning may be important, along with encouraging businesses and organisations to get involved in schemes promoted by schools. The Commission and the Member States should provide a more transparent definition of "equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes" and draw up a coherent set of indicators for drawing comparisons at the various levels and for assessing outcomes, with the involvement of the social partners and civil society.

<sup>(9)</sup> The symposium, which was held on 14-16 November 2011, was co-organised by the European Commission and the Council of Europe in conjunction with a number of youth organisations such as the European Youth Forum, JUGEND für Europa – the German National Agency for the Youth in Action programme - and the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre ([http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth\\_Policy/docs/Youth\\_Work/Policy/STATEMENT\\_Symposium\\_participants\\_160312.pdf](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Youth_Work/Policy/STATEMENT_Symposium_participants_160312.pdf)).

4.1.4 The EESC believes, however, that the entrepreneurial spirit can only achieve its full potential if it is coupled with the team spirit that education should also be fostering in children and young people.

4.1.5 STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) <sup>(10)</sup> must continue to receive special attention from education systems because they remain at the heart of a society that is dominated by technology and technological development and because highly-skilled workers with considerable scientific knowledge will be in ever greater demand <sup>(11)</sup>. It is important, however, that these subjects are presented in a more user-friendly, more creative and consequently more attractive manner that also facilitates greater and better gender balance <sup>(12)</sup>.

4.1.6 The document makes no reference to the effects of the crisis and of adjustment policies on science and research and its stakeholders (researchers, academics, universities) or to the brain drain that is taking place in different EU countries. In a number of opinions <sup>(13)</sup>, the EESC has commented on the need to press ahead with completing the European Research Area and has stated that the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology should be the "fifth freedom" of the internal market.

##### 4.2 Vocational skills

4.2.1 The EESC shares the Commission's concern at the mismatch between education and the labour market. It is clear that an education system out of step with the labour market could not only generate skills that are incomplete but also and even worse, unemployment <sup>(14)</sup>. The EESC agrees that greater attention should be given to a review of vocational education and training and for greater mutual understanding of the links between these and the labour market, to ensure that they genuinely meet its requirements, and emphasises that *the involvement of the social partners and organised civil society is indispensable for vocational training that is relevant to the labour market* <sup>(15)</sup>.

<sup>(10)</sup> STEM is the English acronym.

<sup>(11)</sup> According to CEDEFOP, the demand for highly-skilled individuals could grow by 16 million by 2020 and mid-skilled workers by an average of 3.5 million, while the demand for poorly skilled workers could fall by 12 million.

<sup>(12)</sup> A number of projects carried out in various Member States have shown that the teaching of mathematics can be made more attractive.

<sup>(13)</sup> OJ C 95, 23.04.2003, p. 8; OJ C 218, 11.09.2009, p. 8; OJ C 306, 16.12.2009, p. 13; OJ C 132, 03.05.2011, p. 39; OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 121; OJ C 181, 21.06.2012, p. 111; OJ C 299, 04.10.2012, p. 72; OJ C 229, 31.07.2012, p. 60; OJ C 44, 15.02.2013, p. 88; OJ C 76, 14.03.2013, p. 43; OJ C 76, 14.03.2013, p. 31).

<sup>(14)</sup> UNESCO's revised recommendation on technical and vocational education points out that given the immense scientific, technological and socio-economic development, either in progress or envisaged, which characterises the present era, particularly globalisation and the revolution in information and communication technology, technical and vocational education should be vital aspects of the educational process in all countries (UNESCO, 2001).

<sup>(15)</sup> Memorandum on Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training in Europe Berlin, 10-11 December 2012.

4.2.2 ICT training and skills certification is of enormous importance to the labour market: investment should therefore be made in the appropriate programmes in order to guarantee these skills in vocational training and higher education, especially concerning young women. The EESC supports the proposal for a European quality seal for industry and for ICT training and certification.

4.2.3 The EESC reaffirms every individual's right to have a range of knowledge and skills that enable him or her to play a full role in working life and in society. The right to vocational training should not be granted only to young people who will go on to join the labour market, but also to all workers, to enable them to update their skills and meet the challenges arising from the changes that are currently taking place. Employability is not the preserve of young people alone.

4.2.4 Work-based learning, and especially dual systems that combine classroom teaching with experience in the workplace, can play an important role in effecting the changes needed to create jobs<sup>(16)</sup>, but they must form part of the education system, which requires some clarification of the roles of the different players concerned. Raising awareness among schools and business of this type of learning is vitally important<sup>(17)</sup>.

### 4.3 *Stimulating open and flexible learning*

4.3.1 Recognising that models are changing at a hitherto unseen speed (from an industrial society to a knowledge society and thence to a network society) requires a more creative and innovative approach, linking different areas of life and different activities, acknowledging and valuing successes, building bridges between culture, general education and vocational training and the labour market and fostering complementarity between non-formal and formal learning, while at the same time promoting equal opportunities.

4.3.2 Stimulating learning makes sense, provided that people are enabled to take advantage of it and that this task does not depend solely on the effort that each person can and must make. Otherwise, the groups that are already by their nature the most disadvantaged or marginalised will, collectively, remain segregated. The EESC consequently notes, with growing unease, that participation in adult education programmes remains very low; according to the Commission, the average percentage of EU adults in lifelong learning is 8.9 % and in seven Member States barely reaches 5 %.

<sup>(16)</sup> The Communication mentions the following sectors as having growth potential: information and communication technologies (ICT), health, low carbon technologies, personalised services, business services, the maritime economy and green sectors, or those undergoing major transformation requiring a better skilled workforce.

<sup>(17)</sup> Experience of the dual system in Austria is an example of a good practice that warrants close attention to the conditions needed to achieve it and to the outcomes that delivered in the meantime.

4.3.3 Procedures for the recognition of knowledge acquired outside school (non-formal education), currently too formalist, need to be improved. It should also be emphasised that decisions need to be the result of consultation with the relevant social partners and other civil society organisations and that the State should be responsible for ensuring the quality of this recognition. Recognition procedures can more effectively help to increase the visibility, especially among the social partners, of the benefits of non-formal education. It is also important to provide information that is as broad and as easy to understand as possible about the modes of recognition and validation of skills to ensure that they benefit everyone.

4.3.4 At a time of high unemployment, especially among young people, rethinking the acquisition of skills in a more open and flexible way is a major medium- and long term challenge for Europe. Meeting these challenges requires that the Member States, among other things:

- a) ensure that everyone is able to engage in lifelong learning, enabling them to upgrade their skills and gain access to more highly qualified jobs, thus achieving the goal of "inclusive growth" contained in the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- b) guarantee young people the opportunity to consult career guidance specialists;
- c) improve, through practical, innovative and creative measures on which agreement is reached through social dialogue, training (further training and retraining) for those already in work or who would like to be, but who have inadequate academic or non-academic skills. These initiatives should take account of the age, experience and knowledge of the workers in question;
- d) formalise the individual's right to high-quality certified training, stipulating a number of training hours per year for all workers, irrespective of their qualifications or type of contract;
- e) encourage businesses to draw up skills upgrade plans, involving both workers and employers, taking into account the situation of the business, especially where SMEs are concerned, thereby complying with the agreements reached between the social partners at the European level;
- f) support initiatives aimed at raising the visibility of skills acquired outside formal education, boosting recognition of non-formal learning and guaranteeing its quality.

4.3.5 The Committee supports the Commission's intention to create a European Area of Skills and Qualifications to ensure greater convergence and transparency in the recognition of skills and qualifications in the EU.

#### 4.4 Supporting Europe's teachers and educators

4.4.1 The EESC shares the communication's recognition of the key role of teachers and educators in improving learning and encouraging children and young people to acquire the skills they need to face the challenges of globalisation. Investing in training and hiring high-quality teachers and educators is therefore a necessary and positive strategy.

4.4.2 Saying that good teachers and educators can make a difference is not, however, the same as saying that teaching alone determines the students' learning or underestimating the socio-economic context in which this takes place.

4.4.3 Against a backdrop of far-reaching economic, social and technological change, the teaching profession should be seen as a key element in promoting high-quality education that can adapt to today's requirements, which means that improving teachers' academic and professional training, as well as providing adequate pay and career conditions and making the profession more attractive to young people, are becoming vital issues in this regard. It is also incredibly important to secure greater gender balance in teacher recruitment.

4.4.4 The Committee would like to point out that teacher recruitment should take account of diversity aspects, particularly in terms of ethnic origin, culture, religion, age, etc. Moreover, in a context of free movement of persons and migration, it is particularly vital to boost language and intercultural communication skills among both children/young people and teachers in order to improve cooperation, even when native languages are different. Teachers should be given the right training enabling them to deal with needy pupils and those dropping out of education, in areas facing high social risks and exposed to exclusion. We therefore need teachers that can adapt to a multi-cultural and multifaceted learning environment <sup>(18)</sup>.

#### 4.5 Funding education

4.5.1 The EESC welcomes the Commission's commitment to focussing more on the funding of education, opening a debate with the key actors on the benefits of investing in education <sup>(19)</sup>.

<sup>(18)</sup> OJ C 151, 17.6.2008, p. 41; OJ C 218, 11.9.2009, p. 85.

<sup>(19)</sup> UNESCO has published a new study analysing the contributions of businesses and private foundations to education, which shows that such contributions total no more than USD 683 million per year. To put it into some kind of perspective, this equates to 0.1 % of the profits of the world's two largest oil companies and represents the cost of two Airbus A380 aeroplanes. This is in fact a tiny contribution compared to the USD 16 000 million needed each year to enable all children to attend primary school. Presentation at the Davos Forum, 23 January 2013.

It also supports the idea of working together with the social partners to study how to increase the supply of high-quality workplace training.

4.5.2 The Committee is pleased to note that the Member States are promoting national debates on sustainable funding mechanisms for education and training. However, despite this attention, funding for education and training is decreasing in many Member States <sup>(20)</sup>. The EESC underscores the importance of the broad and ongoing involvement of the social partners and other civil society organisations throughout the process. The Committee welcomes the efforts to involve the private sector in co-financing the education sector, especially vocational education and training, but at the same time recommends that clear criteria be established for the responsibilities shared between the different sectors (public, private and others) in such cases. This cannot entail taking responsibility away from States for the national and international commitments they have given to guarantee appropriate funding and high-quality education for all <sup>(21)</sup>.

4.5.3 The EESC emphatically reaffirms the importance for youth mobility of programmes such as Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action, whose contribution to young people's personal development, skills and qualifications is universally recognised. Funding for these programmes should therefore be increased under the new multiannual financial framework. At the same time, procedures for selecting participants should be improved so that everyone has equal, fair and effective opportunities, with programmes encouraging specific high-risk groups to take part in these initiatives and solutions to overcome financial and skills-related obstacles faced by many students and young people.

#### 4.6 Partnerships

4.6.1 The EESC agrees with the Commission on the importance of closer cooperation with the different actors and social groups in the field of education and training; partnerships can provide an enriching exchange of experiences and represent an opportunity to include in the educational process anyone who can provide and/or update specific skills, especially those in demand by the labour market.

4.6.2 The EESC emphasises the importance of involving all stakeholders (including youth and community organisations, schools and teachers, parents and guardians, businesses and unions, local and regional authorities and other national

<sup>(20)</sup> Eurydice report "Funding of Education in Europe 20-2012. The Impact of the Crisis" ([http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/147EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/147EN.pdf)).

<sup>(21)</sup> The commitment to guarantee high-quality education for all features in all national constitutions and, at international level, in the final declaration of the World Conference on Education, UNESCO, Jomtien, 1990, and in the Millennium Development Goals, UN, New York, 2000, to which all EU Member States are signatories.

government authorities) in school life and of providing clear goals, regular assessments and sufficient resources to ensure they are sustainable. The Committee hopes that the Erasmus for All programme will make a decisive contribution to supporting, encouraging and promoting partnerships that strive to ensure high-quality education and equal opportunities. Education is a holistic process and therefore demands a high level of careers guidance, combined with a vocational advisory service. In addition, there are also many schools which are used after-hours for cultural activities, meetings and continuing education, with facilities for different generations from diverse social groups. Such best practices should be disseminated.

4.6.3 The Committee recognises the value of youth associations in the dynamics of youth participation and their

contribution to solving the immense problems that affect young people today. These include, of course, youth unemployment, the extremely high rates of which are totally unacceptable. Establishing partnerships with these organisations to boost the acquisition of "soft skills" such as organisation, communication, leadership, initiative, knowledge of foreign languages and other skills, could be a positive strategy provided that the resources needed for its implementation are also guaranteed <sup>(22)</sup>.

4.6.4 The EESC welcomes the idea of setting up youth guarantees in the Member States, financed by a specific fund under the multiannual financial programme, although it considers EUR 6 000 million to be clearly insufficient, given that some of this money is already provided by the European Social Fund.

Brussels, 10 July 2013.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Henri MALOSSE

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<sup>(22)</sup> A report by the University of Bath/GHK 2012 showed the impact of formal education on young people's employability and the importance that youth organisations can have in this process.