

CONCLUSIONS

Conference "Youth Education and Employment within the Europe 2020 Strategy", organised jointly by Group III of the EESC, the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council, the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria

Sofia, Bulgaria, 8th of June 2012

Education should be efficient in producing a high standard of excellence and equality in raising the general level of knowledge and skills. The Europe 2020 Strategy sets out the main indicators for education which includes:

- **that the number of early school leavers should be below 10%,**
- **at least 40% of 30-34 years old should have completed a tertiary or equivalent education.**

The successful implementation of these indicators has a direct impact on other strategic domains: employment, innovation and research & development, reduction of poverty and social inclusion.

The current high youth unemployment in Europe is one of the results of a skills mismatch and lack of skills forecast in the region, which is also clearly related to early school leaving.

Drawing on the work of the organizations and institutions taking part in this conference on these issues to date and on the discussions in Sofia on 8th of June 2012, the following are recommended:

Measures to be taken by both governments and universities in order to improve the training and realization of young people:

- Ensure that higher education relates to the public good with guaranteed sustainable funding;
- Assure the accessibility of higher education in the lifelong learning perspective while giving special attention to disadvantaged individuals;
- Continuously analyze the labour market's needs and adapt the results to the curriculum of Universities, but we must also ensure a balance with on-going research, blue sky thinking and widening the horizons of students, not just the job market;
- Significantly expand the level of participation of businesses and society in the curricula design, short and long term planning of Universities and other higher education institutions while maintaining the autonomy;

- Adapt the national qualification frameworks to the European reference in order to ensure equal recognition of every person's qualification in all EU member states;
- Implement quality and transparency tools, such as European standard guidelines for quality assurance and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System - ECTS linked with learning outcomes which are vital to tackle the quality and sustainability of the university sector;
- Shift the education methods towards the student-centred learning, as this allows to focus on the actual talents of the students and allows them to acquire skills more efficiently;
- Universities should focus on nurturing intelligent, enterprising, capable and skilful personalities who would acquire the necessary abilities to benefit the society, culture and the economy;
- Measures should be taken to foster the potential of building connections with the social economy and social entrepreneurship.

Possible policies and measures to reduce the early school leaving:

- Adequate skills have to be acquired while pupils are still in the educational system;
- Systems of education and training need to be modernized, their efficiency and quality have to be increased and they must provide the pupils with the skills and competencies required for their successful participation in the labour market;
- Employment or continued education and training should be guaranteed for young people who are still jobless within four months after they have graduated or left school;
- It is critically important that special attention is given to disadvantaged groups of young people, stressing a sensitive approach to the needs of the different groups – a one size approach is not enough;
- There needs to be a greater supply of high-quality primary vocational education and training (VET), adapted to the needs of young people. These should offer blended forms of training, which accommodate VET and general education which may contribute to reducing early school leaving. Collaboration with employers and synergy between the different education levels – pre-school to university – is vital;
- It is necessary to increase the involvement of parents and local communities and to strengthen the cooperation between schools and businesses in curricular and extracurricular activities;
- Additional legislative measures should be provided to enhance the financial autonomy of the sector, allowing it to attract private capital investment;
- Follow successful practices implemented in several EU Member States (The Netherlands, England, Germany and Italy) by introducing an "individual education number" for each pupil and building a national registry of pupils;

- Mandatory preschool education for children aged 4 and above should be introduced for those who have an insufficient command of their mother tongue by undergoing additional language training in order to help them integrate in the educational system as well as enabling children to socialize.

Measures to be taken to support growth and jobs through the agenda for the modernization of Europe's higher education systems:

- Modernization of Europe's higher education system is a necessity;
- Such modernization should lead to much better correlation between the character and level of education and the needs of the labour market;
- The needs of the labour market should be evaluated first of all on the ex ante concept, not on ex post, and the educational programs and fields of education have to be determined following the results of such evaluations;
- The responsibility of public authorities in close cooperation with employers' representatives is the key to create better correlation between what higher education is offering and the actual needs of the labour market in order to reduce the problem of skills / jobs mismatch and to reduce the overall unemployment level;
- It is needed to assure an increased level of mobility among European students. For this an evaluation of all university qualifications has to be implemented to provide a comparison between the educational offers of universities and ensuring the common system of recognition of qualifications they provide;
- The increased mobility of European students should also lead to the increased openness, pro-European attitude and reduced nationalism and xenophobia;
- A long term labour market forecast which demonstrates the expected proportion of people with higher education and those without has to be made to avoid the risk that high schools would "produce" future employees who have no prospects of finding a job relevant to their level of education.

Sofia, 8th of June 2012