

## **Report Thematic session 2: "Future of learning, future of work, future of Europe"**

by Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, DG EAC

Moderator: Anita Toien Johansen

Rapporteur: Miriam Bertolini

Ms. Toien Johansen, policy officer for international youth cooperation through the Erasmus + programme, began the session by carrying out a voting poll in order to get a broad idea of her audience's perspectives on the future of learning, work and Europe. The 237 participants expressed their opinion as follows:

### **What is the European Union to you?**

13 I'm not sure

20 Free market

177 Mobility/open borders

27 Free roaming

### **How do you see the future of the European Union?**

20 Carrying on like today

76 Those who want more do more

118 Doing more together

16 Doing less together

### **What will be the most important asset for employability in the future?**

10 A university degree

65 Work experience

72 Life experience

89 Contacts

The floor has then been passed to Ms. Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ at DG EAC. The speaker was pleased to find out that mobility is a paramount shared priority of both the audience and the EC.

The speaker brought to the attention of the listeners the August 2017 Eurobarometer survey results that revealed interesting and optimistic outlooks for the future:

- 68% of Europeans **feel they are citizens of the EU**, which is the highest level ever shown by this indicator;
- 56% are **optimistic about the future of the EU** – an increase of six percentage points compared to autumn 2016. The most significant increases can be observed in France (55%, +14 points since last Autumn), Denmark (70%, +13 points) and Portugal (64%, +10 points);
- **Trust in the EU** continues to be on the rise and stands at 42% (up from 36% in autumn 2016 and 32% in autumn 2015);
- 40% of Europeans have a **positive image of the EU** (+5 points since autumn 2016).

On the other hand, terrorism, immigration and economic situation have turned out to be the dominant concerns. President Juncker presented the White paper in relation to the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, setting out possible paths for the future of Europe:

- **Carrying On:** The EU27 focuses on delivering its positive reform agenda;

- **Nothing but the Single Market:** the EU27 is gradually re-centred on the single market;
- **Those Who Want More Do More:** the EU27 allows willing Member States to do more together in specific areas;
- **Doing Less More Efficiently:** the EU27 focuses on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas, while doing less elsewhere;
- **Doing Much More Together:** Member States decide to do much more together across all policy areas.

The participants are invited to develop their own scenarios and share it with their peers.

This year the European Commission is building up to the development not only of a new Erasmus+ programme in 2020, but also of a new Youth Strategy in 2019 of which democratic participation is key. Among the new and different channels that Europe uses to dialogue with youth there's the pilot campaign project "New Narrative for Europe" (NNfE), which highlights themes like **mobility** across member states, unacceptability of **unpaid** internships, and need for relevant and **practical experience** during and after formal education. The campaign underlines a polarization in the debate on future jobs: since according to statistics 60-70% of future jobs have not been invented yet, is it better to follow a labour market-driven approach or develop one's own strengths?

Furthermore, 2017 has been named the "**year of listening**": everybody is invited to share experiences, ideas, worries, questions, inputs, feedback; public opinion is very important for the development of the aforementioned strategies and programmes.

#### Q&A session with Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot

Question 1: How does **unanimity**-at times- prevent progress and hinders European integration in different milieus? How democratic is this requirement, for instance, in terms of currency or army service regulations? The benefits of unanimity are understandable, but can it sometimes obstruct advancements?

- We cannot have a EU that works on unanimity on all steps and issues. Junker's State of the Union speech reinforced this concept: in some fields we have to move from "unanimity" to "qualified majority", especially in fields that are particularly sensitive, such as taxation or national defence. However, with all the limitations that the EU's approach had up to now, we were still able to make progress and move forward.

Question 2: What work could be possibly done to be more effective in reaching out towards national stakeholders and **local** bodies like charities or universities, so that people can be more engaged with Erasmus+?

- We see that we are not doing a good enough work in branding: Erasmus students as beneficiaries themselves sometimes are not always aware of the fact that Erasmus is actually an EU financed program. We intend to reinforce our communication and interaction with representations and universities, but one player that we don't invest in enough and that has a huge potential is people. As alumni, individuals can become ambassadors of such initiatives, informally or officially. What can you do when you are back home in spreading your knowledge and bring the European thought forward in your new contexts?

Question 3: How does the EU cooperate with or takes into account the concerns of **humanitarian agencies** and human rights organizations?

- Of course we should do much more in terms of solidarity aid. Our personal contribution in this sense is the European Solidarity Corps initiative. 37000 people registered in the Corps database to contribute to help people who are in need and, even though for now all projects are located in the EU, it would be great if in the future it could extend beyond Europe.

Question 4: We are in 2017, that means halfway with the program: what conclusions from the results can we take so far, what are ideas on the **beyond 2020**?

- There are basically three keywords that we are looking at in this moment.
  - Do more: we want to reach out to a broader audience, like pupils in secondary school and students in vocational educational training;
  - Inclusiveness;
  - Simplification of bureaucracy.

Question 5: I am a bit concerned about the fact that people are getting more and more stressed about getting a job, and in my personal experience many start to see Erasmus and other programmes not as opportunities but as “compulsory”, given that it is something that has to be in a cv. The risk is that they end up not living the experience in the same way as was lived years ago, which was more focused on personal growth than on **professionalization**.

- This is a very intriguing perspective and it’s a feedback that hasn’t come out from big-scale feedback public consultations with national agencies, university etc.

Question 6: I would like to share my experience regarding Erasmus+. Youth exchanges, trainings or seminars become projects for privileged young people, since travel costs have to be covered by participants before reimbursement is carried out, thus becoming less inclusive and not targeting “socially disadvantaged” people whose financial means don’t allow them to take part in these programs. We should focus on **inclusiveness** and engagement of participants who come from contexts where less opportunities are available, and establish good practices in this respect; the risk is that these initiatives remain reserved to the same group of young privileged people who use exchanges mostly as a traveling opportunity.

### **Wrap up**

Ms. Eriksson Waterschoot invited the participants to draw up a written contribution containing suggestions and perspectives on the matters discussed during the session.