

Declaration of the European Youth Conference in Iecava, Latvia, 13th-17th April 2011

The European Youth Conference allows young members of different nations to meet and discuss various topics, which are important for Europe, and give students the opportunity to take part in exchanges, international projects and other international activities. This means that we can accumulate knowledge that could be restricted by national borders, to increase our understanding and give opportunities for a global view on various topics. This year, at Iecava, Latvia, our topic was Employment Opportunities for Young Individuals in Europe. Participants from Russia, Latvia, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Hungary gathered together to discuss the problem. By each giving a presentation about how each country tackles the issue of unemployment, we can inspire each other.

Building a career is a delicate process during which people gather information about themselves and their surrounding world and analyse it in order to choose the area of work which they would like to pursue. It is important to realise how central the individuals are in planning and building their future and their career. There are many factors influencing a young person's choice of profession including the surrounding world, their ambitions, friends and the media. Parents and a young person's social background will also have a strong influence on their choices.

It can be very challenging for young people to make a decision about their future career when they do not feel equipped with the relevant information about the job opportunities in their country. It is essential that they are given guidance on this in order to ensure a balance in the labour market and to promote the country's development.

Governments, employers and trade unions are advised to address the issue of youth employment challenges at a national and EU level.

During the conference, we listened to eight delegations present the current youth employment situation in their own country. From those presentations we identified the six most common issues affecting employment for young Europeans. In the following declaration we will present our findings and suggested solutions focusing on the problems of the cost of gaining a University degree, qualifications of young job seekers, employment opportunities for graduates, support for unemployed young people, immigration and emigration and illegal work. We will also suggest possible solutions to these problems. Immigration is amongst the most important and discussed contemporary issues in the world. It affects millions of people globally every day, and has a huge impact upon the country's economy.

The cost of obtaining a University Education

The university systems vary a lot across Europe but the solutions we have come up with are viable for the whole of Europe. The first problem we found was that the fees to go to University in some countries are very high. This is because government cuts result in colleges and universities receiving less funding. However we still believe that university fees should be lower so that university is an option for everyone.

Unfortunately many students will still not be able to afford to go to university. Therefore the EU should introduce measures to increase the number of vocational courses so that people become skilled workers. This is also a way of getting more people into employment. In countries like Russia young people who cannot afford to go to university will have alternative options apart from joining the army.

Many students leave university with massive debts so we believe that we need to educate younger students on finances. So when the time comes more students will be able to cope with their finances and be able to enter employment without the baggage of huge debts.

Some students like to leave their country for university and then stay in that country when they decide to enter employment. This means that some countries would be losing valuable employees. Our solution to this is employment opportunities and living conditions need to be improved in order to encourage people to remain in their own countries.

A further problem we identified was that increasingly more and more graduates are becoming qualified with degrees not useful for labour demand. A way in which you could change that is by varying the costs of courses by how useful they are to the country. For example, if a country was in need of doctors, the medical courses would be cheaper so more people would be encouraged to do that course over more expensive courses.

Qualification of young job seekers

There is a lot of emphasis placed on higher education (university) and vocational training is generally seen as less favourable. We found that there is not enough information given to students on vocational training. In the United Kingdom, the pay for vocational students is very low, therefore deterring people from embarking on a vocational course. In vocational qualifications, many people choose the qualifications they like, not the ones which are beneficial to society. For vocational qualifications, you are often required to have a certain degree of work experience, but this isn't provided regularly in schools, therefore vocational qualifications cannot be gained.

We ask for more help and advice from the governments and the EU, regarding vocational qualifications and then perhaps students would see it as an option, instead of university. Careers advisors, supplied by the government, could go into schools and give up to date advice and statistics relevant to vocational qualifications. This would help students consider vocational qualifications as a life choice and they would also know which skills currently have a lot of vacancies. Schools could be more supportive of students who would suit the vocational route and not pressure them into higher education if they have more vocational skills. We should improve the links between employers and educational institutions, such as more work experience and voluntary work which could be done on a fortnightly or monthly basis. More work experience and volunteering would mean more employment, as employers regard work experience highly. We believe that vocational training should be more publicised and encouraged. It should not be seen as inferior to higher education, but seen as a good thing for people to use their skills. Countries within Europe can certainly learn from each other in that respect.

Professions for graduates

There are many problems associated with finding professions for recent graduates. For example, too many students qualify with degrees incongruent to the area of demand for jobs such as taking a degree based in the construction industry in the current economic climate. A lot of jobs and degrees that are in demand are unpopular with students therefore they qualify for jobs where competition is high. Furthermore, often the jobs that are in demand require very high grades. As a solution to this, we believe that too much emphasis is placed upon achieving the necessary grades and thus an interviewing process could be used during which students are assessed on their non-educational abilities that are suitable for the degree and the job. So if a student has a passion or an interest in a subject they will be willing to work harder and they are given a greater opportunity to achieve their goal.

Another problem addressed, is the fact that many students are unaware of what course they want to take at university hence they study a degree which is either worthless or they have no interest in. So, students should be aided by special agencies to choose a degree suitable for them and given the necessary information and requirements of the degree and the resulting job opportunities relevant to their interests. Moreover, relevant work experience in the job should be provided by the school and the agencies so the student receives the full experience of the job before they make a big decision about their education for future job opportunities.

Therefore, they fully understand their commitments and the role they will potentially embark on for the rest of their working lives.

Many students cannot financially support themselves while studying at university and as a result many students are discouraged from taking a degree course. Governments should provide financial support for students going to university and when they qualify and are employed, the graduates pay a higher rate of tax for a certain number of years in order to pay back a proportion of the governments' investment. The students graduating with jobs more highly in demand will have to pay this higher rate of tax for a shorter period of time. This also encourages students from poorer backgrounds to become highly educated and become better qualified.

A general solution would be for the government to increase the number of university places available for students and also the number of jobs available for graduates. Therefore, there would be more graduates to meet the demand for jobs and more jobs available for job seeking graduates. However we realise that this is going to be an ongoing challenge.

Support For The Unemployed

We think that the idea of the government paying unemployment benefit for a prolonged period of time could be detrimental to peoples' motivation to return to work. Nevertheless, we recognise the importance of people having the means to survive during periods of unemployment. Instead, the government should provide paid employment for the unemployed.

They could provide work in sectors the government has work in: administration in government offices and the upkeep of local areas. However, there are only so many jobs in these sectors, so we have the problem that the government cannot employ people when it does not control the work.

In order to overcome this problem, governments could nationalise industries to employ more people, or encourage employers to take on workers through tax incentives. The state could also work to help people set up their own businesses, perhaps providing financial support.

Businesses can help by linking with the education system so people are prepared and have the qualifications needed for employment. They could also choose to reduce hours rather than make workers redundant when, economically, times are hard. Both of these measures can help to prevent unemployment, lessening pressure on organisations that must provide support for the unemployed.

Workers' organisations can play a part in supporting the unemployed. Trade Unions can negotiate with employers and protest against governmental or commercial

decisions which disadvantage the unemployed. Some also provide some financial and legal assistance to unemployed members.

The unemployed can also help themselves on a small scale by forming co-operatives, where workers exchange their goods and skills without depending on a monetary system or employer. This, however, cannot be a solution on a large scale due to logistical problems.

Immigration/emigration

We analysed the immigration and emigration situation across our home countries and created a list of what we thought were the main problems.

The first problem that we came up with was the high number of unskilled workers seeking employment in other more economically developed countries, where they hoped for a better quality of life and increased pay for their work. They will often work for a lower wage than the native people of that country, meaning in many cases they are given the job. The problem is that this makes some of the native people redundant and therefore angry, sometimes leading to divisions within society. In many situations a lot of the migrant workers will work for lower than the minimum wage, making this employment illegal. The worker is then at risk of being exploited by the employer, and his/her working rights are taken away, meaning they will work longer hours for less pay and in worse conditions.

We believe that the EU should fight illegal immigration and focus on providing greater opportunities and conditions for legal migrant workers. Improving border control would help prevent a large number of illegal immigrants from entering the various countries. Illegal immigrants can lead to employers making use of illegal work, as it is far harder for a government to control citizens of which it is unaware.

Another possible way of solving this would be to distribute the migrant workers evenly across a country. We believe countries could introduce incentives to encourage and facilitate migrant workers to work and live in areas where there is greater workforce demand and sufficient infrastructure.

As well as immigration, there are also many problems caused by the emigration of people out of a country. The main cause of this is too many skilled workers leaving a country causing a 'brain drain'. This is usually due to them wanting to have better opportunities and living conditions abroad. This loss of skilled workers from a country means that replacement migrant workers usually take the top jobs, creating tension amongst native people.

We arrived at two solutions to this problem. The first was to have stronger connections between the labour market and university courses. There are many

ways to do this, one example is the idea of “Studium Plus” which was introduced a few years ago. After leaving school, German students can sign a contract with a company and go to university to study a degree relating to the company’s needs. While studying for their degree funded by the company, students work for them. After completion of their degree the student is contracted to work for the company for several years. This is a way to connect the student to the labour market.

The second solution was to keep large companies in their own country, to ensure there are enough jobs for people in that country. This would help to stop the emigration of skilled workers away from the country, reducing the ‘brain drain’.

We are aware that all these problems will not be solved in the immediate future but will take time. It depends on the economic growth, the social development and the political decisions in each country and Europe. We feel that with the above recommendations countries can steer themselves in the right direction.

Illegal Work

Illegal work is a problem for every European country particularly in Italy, Latvia and Russia. Illegal work such as ‘cash in hand’ payments mean governments cannot receive the same tax revenue as they should, impacting social security.

Employing people illegally means it is cheaper for the employer as no compulsory financial contributions are made to the state, resulting in great damage for all of society.

A number of solutions should be brought into power in order to avoid this:

1. A change in laws and their relative punishments: If the punishments for employing illegal workers are higher, such as facing an extended prison sentence and a heavy fine, employers will be deterred from making use of these workers, thereby allowing the government to receive tax from employee’s salaries.
2. The introduction of Identification cards: The presence of ID cards would help support the control over who has the right to be working in the various countries and make things such as illegal immigration easier to control.

In order to achieve these goals, governmental support is vital, as governments have the power and the means to pass laws to support these solutions and help eliminate the problem of illegal work.

We the delegates of the European Youth Conference 2011, urge our local, national and European representatives to consider and act on these important employment issues facing young people in Europe today.