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RESOLUTION

on Overcoming the impact of the economic crisis on youth unemployment in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries

EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY – RESOLUTION

on Overcoming the impact of the economic crisis on youth unemployment in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries

The EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly,

- having regard to the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004, and in particular to the Commission’s progress reports on its implementation;
- having regard to the Joint Communication of the Commission and the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 November 2015 entitled ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)’ and to the Council Conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 14 December 2015;
- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit adopted in Riga on 22 May 2015;
- having regard to the Joint Working Document of the Staff of the EC and of the HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on ‘Eastern Partnership - Focusing on key priorities and deliverables’ of 15 December 2016;
- having regard to the Eastern Partnership Youth Policy Analytic Report published by the European Commission in December 2015;
- having regard to the European Commission communication of 4 October 2016 on the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on;
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2016 on Skills policies for fighting youth unemployment;
- having regard to the Erasmus Impact Study published by the European Commission in September 2014;
- having regard to the new assistance package of €79.8 million to boost socio-economic development and SMEs, youth employability and connectivity in the Eastern Partnership countries, announced by the European Commission on 19 September 2016;
- having regard to the outcomes of the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum that took place in Riga on 10-11 February 2015 with a focus on youth employment and cross-sectorial cooperation in the area of youth;
- having regard to the Euronest PA resolution of 28 May 2013 on combating poverty and social exclusion in the Eastern Partner countries;
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), COM/2015/0429 final;

- having regard to 2015 Yerevan Communiqué issued by Ministerial Conference of EHEA (Yerevan, 2015);
 - having regard to UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE, 1960);
 - having regard to the United Nations universal Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 8 that calls on governments and other actors to 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
 - having regard to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation;
- A.** whereas today we have the largest youth generation in human history with 1.8 billion young people living on the planet and approximately 85% of them living in emerging and developing economies and fragile states;
 - B.** whereas of the one billion more youth that will enter the job market in the next decade, only 40 percent are expected to be able to get jobs that currently exist, therefore the global economy will need to create 600 million jobs over the next 10 years - five million jobs each month - simply to keep pace with projected youth employment rates;
 - C.** whereas young people have been especially hit by the financial and economic crisis in the last ten years; whereas the global youth unemployment rate is on the rise, having reached its historical peak of over 13 per cent in 2016 (from 12.9 in 2015), where it is expected to remain in 2017. As a result, the number of unemployed youth globally rose by half a million in 2016 to reach 71 million and is likely to remain at this level in 2017;
 - D.** whereas the Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved without addressing the challenges facing young people in finding employment in every region of the world;
 - E.** whereas more than 4.2 million young people (aged 15-24 years) were unemployed in August 2016 in the EU and long-term youth unemployment still remains too high in some EU Countries;
 - F.** whereas World Bank research shows that unlike other regions the effects of the crisis on unemployment on Europe and Central Asia have been prolonged and unemployment levels have not reached pre-crisis levels;
 - G.** whereas youth unemployment rates in the Eastern Partnership countries differ considerably, oscillating between 5 % and 33% in 2015, due to the different situations of national labour markets;
 - H.** whereas, for young people, the lack of viable employment opportunities is often the primary factor discouraging their active search for a job. As youth unemployment rates remain persistently high and transition from education to work becomes increasingly difficult, a growing share of youth are neither employed, nor in education or training

(NEET- more than 6,6 million people aged 15-24 in 2015), a status which carries risks of skills deterioration, underemployment and distress;

- I.** whereas the lack of relevant skills for available jobs and the education and training mismatch are important factors causing youth unemployment; despite being more educated and skilled than previous generations, young people continue to face significant structural hurdles in obtaining quality employment according to EU and national standards; without efficient and sustainable job creation in Europe, the youth employment crisis cannot be solved;
- J.** whereas effective guidance programmes have a positive impact on economic and social outcomes; whereas young job seekers and graduates should make more use of career guidance and information services, which should better answer expectations of young people entering the labour market ;
- K.** whereas small and medium-sized enterprises are one of the most important generators of youth employment, accounting for considerably more than 80 % of all jobs, thereby performing an important service to the labour market as a whole, as they play crucial role in the transition towards a new, sustainable economy;
- L.** whereas any policies relating to skills, competencies and education must first and foremost be rights-based, give young people a choice and empower them; whereas therefore for those policies to be successful it is of utmost importance that young people are the key stakeholders themselves, along with education institutions and businesses or training providers;
- M.** whereas early integration, investment in education and training, emphasis on practical skills, the dual vocational training system combining work experience and studying have been key instruments for certain EU Member States to be more resilient against rising youth unemployment during the crisis;
- N.** whereas the European Training Foundation plays a key role in facilitating the reforms of vocational education and training and employment systems in the Eastern Partnership countries;
- O.** whereas young NEETs require particular attention, as individuals belonging to this group frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth; whereas the EU Youth Employment Initiative, a fund that is partly complemented from the European Social Fund and is targeting NEETs, referred to by the European Council in February 2013, has proven to be a successful instrument for the EU to combat youth unemployment;
- P.** whereas the European NEET rate is particularly high for young women; whereas specific attention to the gender perspective must be a priority;
- Q.** whereas, according to the 2014 Erasmus Impact study by the European Commission, young graduates who have obtained skills and experience abroad through the Erasmus programme have much better opportunities, and improved skills, than students who have not gone abroad; whereas a similar experience has been made with the Leonardo programme targeting apprentices;

- R.** whereas a spin-off of the Erasmus programme, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, gives young people interested in entrepreneurship the chance to learn and experience by working with experienced counterparts running small businesses in other participating countries;
- S.** whereas sustainable quality job creation could be achieved through investment in, for example, green jobs, renewable energies, sustainable housing, energy efficiency, research and development, IT and other innovative sectors, that can employ many young people;
- T.** whereas delays in access to the labour market and long periods of unemployment adversely affect career prospects, pay, health and social mobility for youth;
- U.** whereas young people are an asset to the European economy and they should be supported in acquiring the skills required by the labour market, anticipating tomorrow's needs, including coding and e-skills which are indispensable for economic activity in the 21st century;
- V.** whereas high unemployment and idleness, particularly among young people, remains one of the most formidable challenges the Eastern European countries face, limiting prospects for increasing living standards and economic growth;
- W.** whereas high unemployment force young job-seekers to work involuntarily in informal, part-time or low-paid unpopular jobs;
- X.** whereas, when facing the prospect of unemployment, poverty or vulnerable forms of employment, the youth tend to look abroad for better education and job opportunities; whereas the migration of the youth hinders the social cohesion and economic growth of the Eastern Partnership and the EU countries;
- Y.** whereas, across most labour market indicators, wide disparities exist between young males and females, especially during the transition to adulthood; whereas such disparities can represent inequalities of opportunity and reflect deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural discriminations that tend to disproportionately disadvantage women;
- Z.** whereas young persons with a migrant background have higher rates of unemployment, education or training;
- AA.** stresses that sustainable economic, education and youth employment systems are essential priorities of the EU and Eastern European countries and that the partners are committed to taking concrete initiatives to promote integration and employability in the labour market, particularly in the field of youth employment; reiterates that partner Parliaments have regularly identified employment, education and training as some of the highest political priorities for the EU Members States and Eastern Partner countries' governments;
- BB.** welcomes, in this regard, the initiatives of the EU and of the Eastern European Partners to put in place youth strategies and legislation addressing the areas of education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and active participation in civil

society; calls upon the EU and Eastern European Partners to enhance the implementation of existing youth strategies and legislation; encourages both parties to set quality targets and benchmarks for inclusive education systems that ensure equality, non-discrimination and civic competences;

1. calls upon the EU and the Eastern European Partners to develop a rights-based approach to combat youth unemployment, focussing on quality employment and on the involvement of youth as the stake-holder in the policy-making;
2. calls on the EU and the Eastern European Partners to engage vigorously on exchanging experiences in job creation, the involvement of youth in policies directed to them, the protection of economic, social and human rights at work and in addressing youth unemployment;
3. calls on the EU to step up cooperation with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and relevant international organisations on private sector development and initiatives that promote inclusive growth and employment and improve living conditions for citizens as demanded by the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy;
4. stresses that reducing the rate of early school leaving would provide both the European economy and the economy of the Eastern European Partners with thousands more qualified employees annually;
5. stresses the need to combat early school leaving, which can be a first step into lifelong poverty, can lead to so-called "early scarring" and contributes to unemployment;
6. stresses that discrimination based on age for the access to social benefits, including access to unemployment benefits, should be addressed;
7. stresses the need to promote policies to improve the transition from informal employment to quality jobs, as well as the need to develop transition strategies from education and training to work;
8. stresses the importance of providing support for young parents, especially young mothers, so as to ensure that they can earn a living income, continue to learn and work according to their abilities while fulfilling their caring responsibilities; stresses that early support and investment are key to avoid lifelong income losses;
9. believes that the promotion of more and equal opportunities for young people, furthering social inclusion, gender equality and solidarity and fighting all forms of discrimination, in particular on grounds of gender, race or ethnic origin or disability, are central for achieving the objective of reducing youth unemployment;
10. believes that the Parliaments of the Eastern Partners and the European Parliament should be involved in the strategic approach for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of relevant initiatives aimed at supporting youth employment at all levels, and that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly could provide valuable input into it;

- 11.** calls on the EU Member States to enhance the exchange of positive knowledge's between EU member states and the Eastern Partners in the field of creation of the job opportunities for young people;
- 12.** encourages the Eastern Partners to participate in a range of EU youth programs: Erasmus+, the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee, EU4Youth, bilateral and regional programmes for vocational education and training (VET) and the Creative Europe programme, as well as international youth programs such as Solution for Youth Employment (S4YE); believes that young learners and apprentices who have obtained skills and experience abroad have much better opportunities, and improved skills, than those who have not gone abroad;
- 13.** calls for an increase in funding for such EU youth programmes, including the European Youth Guarantee, ensuring the added value and quality of the training and jobs offered; asks to consider the extension of the age limit for participating in such programmes to reflect the reality that many graduates and labour market entrants are in their late 20s;
- 14.** calls on the governments of the Eastern European countries to ensure that general, professional and higher education systems adequately prepare students for professional realisation and to guarantee close cooperation between representatives of the education sector, social services, employers and students;
- 15.** calls on the governments of the Eastern European countries and Member States to ensure that girls and young women are encouraged to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and to increase the representation of women in STEM areas;
- 16.** given that education and training have a dramatic importance in fostering inclusion and equality, stresses that emphasis should be given also on the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning skills gained during the mobility programmes implemented in line with the European or national qualifications frameworks; encourages the Member States to promote and support the opportunities for professional mobility among young apprentices to enable them to develop their skills through contact with other training systems;
- 17.** stresses that a smooth transition from education to employment should be promoted by linking theoretical education with practical training and providing high-quality internships as stipulated in the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships as well as through the recognition of qualifications gained during formal and non-formal education, or during volunteering experiences;
- 18.** emphasises that the setting-up of bilateral Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova is a crucial tool for modern, transparent and predictable trade and regulatory approximation, as well as for foreign direct investment leading to job creation and long-term growth; acknowledges at the same time that Eastern Partner countries may follow various paths in order to enhance economic and trade relations with the EU and their neighbours;
- 19.** welcomes, in this regard, the fact that the Association Agreements, including bilateral DCFTAs, between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine respectively, commit EU and Eastern Partners to enhance people-to-people contacts, including through cooperation

and exchanges in the fields of science and technology, business, youth, education and culture; reiterates that collaboration is critical to restore the growth and support entrepreneurship, investments and job creation in the region; and urges EU member states and Eastern Partners to explore the possibilities to elaborate mixed employment and fellowship programs for youth in perspective fields of economy in the region;

20. stresses that, in the framework of the freedom of movement in the Eastern Partnership labour mobility should remain a choice for young people and not become an obligation to earn a living abroad; stresses that mobility bears various challenges; stresses that young people should also have employment opportunities in their own regions and countries;
21. stresses the negative impact of brain drain when well-qualified young people leave their countries, which is especially harmful in smaller countries where highly qualified employees are particularly valuable; encourages the EU and the Eastern Partners to address youth labour migration from the Eastern Partners to the EU jointly so as to ensure circular migration and options for young people to return to their home and find quality sustainable employment at the place of their choice;
22. urges the EU to refocus its relations with the European Partners, where necessary, on shared common interests and own merits, in particular economic development, with a major stress on youth employment; also urges the EU to help Eastern Partner countries to speed up work on the reform of their industrial policy, which could determine a transition to a knowledge-based competitive economy;
23. calls on the Commission to make full use of all existing tools under the European Neighbourhood Instrument, in particular those focused on the youth, to support job creation in Eastern Partner countries;
24. notes that European Union funds can be an extraordinary tool for the growth and development of people's opportunities; calls for greater financial resources to be used to spread information on European Union financial instruments and to broaden, in universities and businesses, the knowledge and skills that are necessary for applying for funds, elaborating and managing projects;
25. with the purpose of increasing significantly the weight of the private sector in job generation, urges the authorities of the Eastern Partners to develop a set of incentives for job creation by private enterprises: easing existing administrative and financial requirements for starting and managing businesses, through the simplification of procedures, easier access to credit, venture capital and microfinance for start-ups;
26. stresses the need for the development of self-employment among young people, the expansion of access to soft loans and the development of entrepreneurial skills;
27. stresses the key role of enterprises, including SMEs, in training young people on working-life skills and the need to provide them with education to entrepreneurship in the broadest possible sense; encourages the inclusion in the curricula of references to the vocational skills needed for starting and managing businesses; as well, encourages the fostering of transversal entrepreneurship competences, skills and knowledge, to effectively delivered through hands-on and real-life experiences;

- 28.** calls on the governments of the Eastern European Partner countries to develop comprehensive national strategies on employment, with a strong focus on the youth, as recommended by the *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation*; as well, calls on them to reinforce State Employment Agencies, as appropriate, to make them central bodies which would act as essential support providers for young people, develop the unified registry of unemployed people and provide a comprehensive framework for the sectorial action plans proposed in the employment package by the relevant governments;
- 29.** stresses the need for the EU to consult partners on the establishment of a panel on youth employment and employability within the Eastern Partnership as stated by the 2015 Review of EU Neighbourhood Policy;
- 30.** in line with the Review of EU Neighbourhood Policy's call on the EU to create new alliances of private sector, EU, Member States and IFIs supporting strategies for growth, jobs or youth, consideration should be given to partnership with the World Bank fostered multi-stakeholder coalition Solutions for Youth Employment (SY4E);
- 31.** stresses the EU's work on skills-forecasting especially as regards green jobs and ICT, and believes that matching skills with available or predictable working opportunities should remain a top priority for the EU and the Eastern Partners;
- 32.** to enhance cooperation with regard to youth and student exchanges and development of new scholarship programmes, trainings, stresses that the facilitation of the participation to the programme "Erasmus+" will ensure the development of skills and will enable the Eastern Partners youth to become acquainted with EU and vice-versa, offering them better opportunities and facilitating the employment;
- 33.** calls the EU and the governments of Eastern Partner countries to encourage, promote, and reform the business environment; stresses the importance of development through entrepreneurship and SME's; reiterates that this sector creates many job opportunities, including for youth;
- 34.** encourages the EU and the governments of Eastern Partner countries to harmonise the digital environment and to support implementing a better digital economy in their collaboration; stresses that this type of economy will create jobs, particularly for youth;
- 35.** calls the EU and the governments of Eastern Partner countries to promote agriculture; stresses the real importance of this sector. Modernisation and diversification in rural areas are necessary in order to create jobs and re-involving youth in the development and growth of the sector;
- 36.** stresses the need for regular surveys and polls on the level of youth employment (including by profession) after graduation, as well as for the definition of a set of indicators to clarify the nature of those figures, in order to assess the quality of education and to provide young people with the skills (qualifications) that are required by the labour market;
- 37.** instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EEAS, the

governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Eastern European Partner countries.