

BACKGROUND REPORT

POLICIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

3-053.3(20)

Summary

Since the 1960s the European Community has backed the principle of a youth policy seen by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers as an essential element of Community bonding. Indeed, polls show young people favouring the unification of Europe.

Positive policies have emerged in the 1980s aimed at combating economic recession, particularly among the young. There are 53 million young people aged 14-25 out of the total 320 million population of the Community. Some 40 per cent of the Community jobless are under the age of 25 (1).

To help young people the Community concentrates on three main heads: (i) help find employment; (ii) develop personal skills, particularly among those least favoured in society, and (iii) broaden knowledge of European countries through exchange visits and courses.

Training is regarded as a major tool in encouraging adult success. In December 1987, the 12 Community countries re-emphasised their policy to encourage young people leaving school to undertake vocational training. They were responding to new demands arising from rapid technological and social change (2).

Qualified students are encouraged to participate, through their universities or colleges, in exchange visits where they share courses with others in a Community country outside their own. COMETT (Community Action Programme for Education and Training for Technology) links closely with higher education and industrial or service companies. ERASMUS (The European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) operates among universities or equivalent colleges in developing a pool of graduates with direct experience in other Community cultures and practices. Courses on business and engineering are particularly popular with British students.

Through qualification agreements (3), skilled workers can find employment in Community countries in the electricity industry, as motor vehicle

(1) See European File 1-2/1988. In 1987 there were 16.3m people unemployed in the EC.

(2) OJ L 346 of 10.12.1987

(3) OJ L 331 of 19.12.1984

Note: Some useful contacts are listed on the last page of this BR. ./.

Note: Background reports are intended as non copy-right ready-reference material on topics of current interest concerning the European Community. An index will be provided periodically so anyone receiving the reports can refer to each number more easily.

mechanics, in hotel and catering, or in jobs in construction and agriculture, provided, of course, jobs are available and applicants are reasonably fluent in the appropriate language. The Community's youth policy is not, however, limited only to trade and economics. It covers the arts and sport.

While some schemes are, perhaps, symbolic, with the help of the European Social Fund successful results have been achieved in the last few years. They have created a growing strata of young people who understand what the European Community means.

Background

Article 50 of the Rome Treaty encourages the exchange of young workers within the Community. In The Hague in 1969, Community leaders backed the principles of a youth policy and, over the years, Education Ministers have agreed joint initiatives to link Community educational and vocational institutions and to encourage mobility of students. In 1982, member countries wanted improved cooperation in education policies aimed at combating economic recession. There was a demand for vocational training and job opportunities for people under the age of 25, a theme that has been pursued since.

Though the unemployment level of the early 1980s has remained static or fallen slowly, today more than two-fifths of the Community unemployed are under the age of 25. In 1984 a Council Resolution (1) recommended employment of young people through the creation of new jobs by private employers, expansion of the public sector, and development of new enterprises. The European Youth Forum, set up in 1973, linked with the UN International Youth Year in 1985, and focuses on social and economic questions, including youth employment. Community legislation also emphasises the importance of aiding young immigrants or the disabled, and the necessity of equal opportunities for young women and men in training schemes.

A summary of schemes

This summary is meant to provide an overall picture of Community youth policies and does not give a detailed review of existing projects. Programmes are concerned with youth employment, mainly through training, exchange visits, and young people's projects, and interests in the arts and sports. The European Social Fund contributes significantly to Community youth policies.

Employment

The Commission recognises that employment policies rest mostly on national governments, backed by Community financial assistance through the European Investment Bank or the European Regional Fund. The 1984 Resolution stressed the need of employers and workers to cooperate in reorganizing and reducing working time to further the recruitment of young people, and of local authorities to offer job and training opportunities in community work schemes.

Such schemes rarely succeed, however, unless they are backed by appropriate vocational training, and it is in this area that the Community has proved most helpful.

(1) OJ C 29 of 4.2.1984

Training

The Council Decision adopted in December 1987 (1), supported vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life, extending earlier intentions urged by the summit European Council in Milan in 1985. Young people, who wish it, should now receive at least 12 months or, if possible two or more years of vocational training after their compulsory school education. The scheme runs from 1 January 1988-1992, and is seen as a preparation for the completion of the barrier-free internal market in that period.

The legislation favours links and partnerships between education and training systems coordinated by public, private and voluntary sectors, and encourages enterprise and initiatives among young people in fostering the growth of small and medium-sized firms. The Commission anticipates the launching of a European Network of training to link up national and regional projects on these lines. CEDEFOP (Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) in Berlin assists in the implementation of the programme.

Exchanges

In 1986 the Commission urged the Council to adopt a Community action programme - YES for Europe - aimed at promoting youth exchanges interested in economic, social, cultural or sporting activities, in improving the quality of youth exchanges, and encouraging mixtures from all Community regions (2). The plan was to spend 30m ECU (£21m) over 1987-89, but, so far, the scheme has not been accepted by the Council of Ministers.

In Britain the Central Bureau for education, visiting and exchanges and the Youth Exchange Centre already encourage young people to visit across the world, including the European Community. If YES is approved shortly the Youth Exchange Centre, which would normally act as the Commission agency in Britain, could no longer exist in its present form. At present, the Centre, which is backed by the Foreign Office, the Department of Education and the British Council is funded by a Foreign Office grant of £750,000 paid to the Centre.

Meanwhile, in 1986 and 1987 the Community adopted two important student schemes, COMETT (Community Action Programme for Education and Training for Technology) (3) and ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) (4). Reference to universities include higher-education colleges, such as the Polytechnics in Britain. The aim of COMETT is to put qualifying students in touch with high technologies in industry, and enable them to benefit from developments in countries outside their own. The new organizations, University-Enterprise Training Partnerships, (UETPs), bring companies and colleges together to agree on qualified personnel needs. The scheme runs for three years, 1987-89, and the 1987 Annual Report recently published (5) claims that COMETT's first business year was a great success. There were 1,035 COMETT requests in 1987, representing approximately 2,600 individual projects. More than 1,500 undertakings, 900 universities and 750 other professional, public and private organizations expressed their interest.

(1) OJ L 346 of 10.12.1987. See also Press Release IP(87) 527 of 2.12.1987

(2) OJ C 72 of 27.3.1986 and amended version OJ C 77 of 24.3.1987

(3) OJ L 222 of 8.8.1986

(4) OJ L 166 of 25.6.1987. See also BR ISEC/B6/88

(5) Press Release P/88/13 of 9.2.1988

COMETT consists of four distinct strands, (A) development of UETPs, (B) industrial placements for students and fellowships for university staff, (C) design and testing of joint university-business projects in the field of continuing education in new technologies, and (D) multi-media training systems for the new technologies.

The UETPs are expected to consider the new projects in 1988 in the Spring. The closing date for the submission of the 1988 projects has been fixed for 31 March, and the Commission will make its decision on the selected projects before next summer. Some of the 1987 projects may be renewed. The overall budget for that year amounted to 16m ECU (£11.2m). Schemes in 1988 offer selected students up to 4,000 ECU (£2,800) from COMETT funds, and for a fellowship, 12,000 ECU (£8,400).

The first three years (1987-1990) period of the ERASMUS programme is designed to provide a pool of graduates with direct Community experience who have benefited from studying for a part of their course in another Community country. The scheme is to cost 80m ECU (£56m) and is expected to sponsor 25,000 students. In the forthcoming 1988-9 academic year, when first applications closed at the end of January, there were expected to be 8,000 'mobile' students in Community universities and colleges. ERASMUS will provide maximum grants of 5,000 ECU (£3,500) per year to students to help cover the 'mobility costs' (travel, language tuition, cost-of-living differential), with other aids to staff and administrators.

Young People's Projects

The Commission believes that many young people are themselves eager to take the initiative in launching projects which are not only constructive and interesting for themselves, but which above all help other young people. The Commission, therefore, wants to give its full backing to this movement towards active youth participation.

The scheme emanates from the Community programme for the transition of young people from school to adult and working life. Grants may be awarded (up to a normal maximum of 10,000 ECU (£7,000)) to projects which are managed and controlled by young people between the ages of 15-25. Such projects include community, voluntary or cultural activities, use of the media and new technology, links with young people in other Community countries, or assistance to disadvantaged young people.

The Commission can provide financial assistance to the launching or development of the scheme in the form of non-renewable grants up to a 12 month period. Applicants are expected to finance at least half the cost of their projects through their own fund raising efforts from other sources, public or private. Projects entirely run by young people may sometimes receive more than 50 per cent of costs from the Commission.

Arts and Sport

The Commission has published plans designed to encourage public understanding of the Community's splendid heritage of arts and architecture, and support the artists of the future (1). The Commission is particularly keen to enable young people participate in and enjoy the arts, such as through the Community Youth Orchestra, and through the recommendation of providing easier access to museums and cultural events. The Commission also wants

(1) COM(87) 603 of 14.12.1987

to expand existing schemes such as scholarships for art and restoration training, encouragement of cultural interests in music, painting, sculpture, theatre and dance, and promotion of festivals.

Sport, however, has become a mass phenomenon and the Commission has sought since 1985 to introduce a Community dimension into European sport (1). This includes the European Yacht Races, cycling under the EC Tour of the Future, tennis competitions under the European Champions' Championship, and Community Swimming Championships. Such activities have attracted young people through the Sail for Europe Association, set up in 1976, and put together, with Community aid, the first European sports team: a crew of young sailors from several Community countries.

But the demand for more sporting events has increased. The Commission has noted that the second Community Swimming Championships (Championnats de Natation de la Communauté Européenne) will be held in Luxembourg in April 1988. Other activities this year include indoor Athletics Championships in France, Weightlifting Championships in Strasbourg, a third edition of the Community's Cycling Tour, and the EC Games, covering 24 different events at 24 venues inside the 12-nation Community in April-May 1989 (2).

There are legal, financial and other difficulties in assembling Community sports teams but the beginning of new sporting activities contributes to new mixes among young people that, at least, can be fun.

The European Social Fund

The European Social Fund provides assistance to training or other schemes, depending on its guidelines. The Guidelines 1988-1990 are concerned with greater selectivity and greater geographical concentration (3), with the continuing concern of reducing unemployment.

Priority operations for young people under 25 include vocational training for those under 18, those who suffer from inadequate education, and extension of vocational training for the long-term (12 months) unemployed. The Fund can meet the cost of up to 50 per cent of approved projects, which must be partly financed by public funds. Applications to the Commission can only come from governments. Help is directed mainly to deprived regions.

Conclusion

The youth policy is only a small part of the Community's overall activity. But now that the European Council agreed in February 1988 on a new Community budgetary policy at least until 1992, topics other than agriculture may receive priority. Youth policies could benefit from more attention.

(1) See European File 6/87

(2) Press Release from Championnats de Natation de La Communauté Européenne

(3) OJ L 167 of 8.8.1986. See also COM(87) 814 of 27.5.1987

SOME USEFUL CONTACTS

Directorate-General V - Employment, Social Affairs and Education
Directorate C - Education, vocational training and youth policy
Commission of the European Communities
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

Telephone: (010) 32 2 235 11 11

COMETT Technical Assistance Unit
Avenue de Cortenbergh 71
B-1040 Brussels

Telephone: (010) 32 2 733 97 55

COMETT Information Centre (UK)
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
York Road
LONDON
SE1 7PH

Telephone: 01-934 9653/4

ERASMUS Bureau
15 rue d'Arlon
B-1040 Brussels

Telephone: (010) 32 2 233 01 11

Youth Exchange Centre
Seymour House
Seymour Mews
LONDON
W1H 9PE

Telephone: 01-486 5101

Department of Employment
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9HH

Telephone: 01-713 3000