

**Opening Speech for Ms Pavan-Woolfe,  
EU Ambassador to the Council of Europe  
EU-CoE Youth Partnership Symposium "Youth & Crisis"  
20 February 2013, 9.00h, CoE Youth Centre, Strasbourg**

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| <b>Speaking points</b> |
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- Good morning. On behalf of the European Commission, one of the co-organisers, I would like to welcome you to this symposium on what is probably the single most important topic for young people today, the effects of the crisis.
- This event is timely. Solutions are urgently needed to find answers to what is probably the worst crisis since the 1930s. In December 2012, 5,7 million persons under 25, or nearly a quarter of all young jobseekers, were unemployed in the EU. And the situation is much more severe in some countries, with peaks reaching more than 55% in Greece and Spain.
- As shown in the EU Youth Report, which presented a comprehensive overview of the situation of young people last year, these unprecedented levels of unemployment do have knock-on effects, including a heightened risk of social exclusion and poverty or effects on their health and well-being.
- A UK study about youth unemployment refers to "the crisis that we cannot afford". This is exactly true. We cannot afford this crisis; we cannot afford to lose a whole generation.
- This is why the EU has made youth employment a top priority, why the EU has taken new dedicated initiatives, and why the EU will continue to explore all possible means and resources to further address this situation.
- How can and does the EU help? There are several EU policies involved, including of course employment, education and youth, each bringing different tools, which we unite in the fight for better chances for our young people.
- Let me start with the latest political news in this respect: Recognising the particularly difficult situation of young people in certain regions, the European Council has decided in its meeting on 7-8 February to create a **Youth Employment Initiative** to add to and reinforce the very considerable support already provided through the EU structural funds. The Initiative will be open to all

regions with levels of youth unemployment above 25%. The support for the Initiative will be EUR 6 000 million for the period 2014-2020.

- This comes on top of earlier initiatives taken under our **Europe 2020** strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Europe 2020 has a strong focus on young people, with headline targets addressing early school-leaving and higher education flagship initiatives addressing youth mobility, skills and poverty reduction.
- The Commission's **Annual Growth Survey 2012** sets out the current priorities for action at EU and national levels in order to boost growth and jobs and urges Member States to address the youth employment situation. It also includes recommendations on quality apprenticeships, traineeships and entrepreneurial skills.
- In addition, the EU pursues dedicated actions under the "**Youth Opportunities Initiative**", which mobilises resources and efforts to drive down youth unemployment and improve their employability. The Commission for example urged Member States to make better use of the European Social Fund and set up action teams to assist those Member States which face above-average youth unemployment rates. The Commission also proposed the introduction of a "**Youth Guarantee**", to ensure that young people get offered a job, traineeship, apprenticeship or further training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.
- Youth policy, through its **EU Youth Strategy**, also contributes to employability of young people through its emphasis on youth work, volunteering and youth participation which all offer forms of informal and non-formal learning. The value of this type of learning has recently been harnessed by the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- **Youth work** applies unique pedagogical approaches and outreach methods. Whilst these provide valuable skills for all young people, these are essential for some, such as school drop outs or young people with specific difficulties. In order to deepen evidence on the value of youth work in supporting young people with the challenges they are facing in these times, the Commission has launched a study, whose results are expected in September and about which you will hear more in the coming two days.
- Another contribution from youth policy is our tool to involve young people and youth organisations directly in the decision-making, the so-called **Structured Dialogue**. This dialogue leads to joint

recommendations agreed between young people and youth policy-makers on the priorities pursued by the Council of Youth Ministers. These recommendations then feed into the Resolutions or Conclusions adopted by the Ministers. The first cycle of Structured Dialogue was devoted to "youth employment", whereas the present cycle is devoted to the "social inclusion of young people".

- All these efforts to boost the *employability, learning mobility and participation* of young people are supported through the current "Lifelong Learning" and "Youth in Action" programmes.

The **"Youth in Action" Programme** - involves each year about 200,000 young people and youth workers in mostly transnational non-formal learning activities. The European Voluntary Service and other "Youth in Action" activities are essential tools in easing young people's employability and increasing young people's self-confidence.

- A survey from 2011 among more than 5000 Youth in Action participants, showed that a vast majority of young people considered that they:
  - had increased their competence in a foreign language;
  - had learned better to achieve something in the interest of their community or society;
  - were better able to identify opportunities for their personal or professional future and
  - had their job chances increased.
- The impact of the Youth in Action Programme does not stop at the EU's boundaries. Within the framework of the Programme, the Commission has established e.g. an "Eastern Partnership Youth Window", which aims at supporting young people with fewer opportunities living in rural or deprived urban areas especially in the six countries of the Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In 2013 and 2014, the Eastern Partnership Youth Window will involve an additional 21,000 young people and youth workers.
- From 2014 onwards the "Lifelong Learning" and "Youth in Action" programmes will be succeeded by a new EU programme.

Negotiations on the Commission's proposed "Erasmus for All" are still on-going but we expect that the future programme will allow more young people to benefit from it.

- As I said earlier, we want to explore all means at our disposal to address the crisis further. Today is one such opportunity. Today, the two major European institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Commission, join forces in facilitating reflection on tackling the consequences of the crisis for young people.
- I hope that this symposium can show ways and means of mastering this big challenge, giving young people new hope and future perspectives. We do not want Europe's young people to end up home demotivated. Remember: this is the crisis that we cannot and do not want to afford.
- In this respect I wish you two days of fruitful exchanges, discussions and look forward to receiving your recommendations.

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