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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

OPINIONS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

490TH PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 22 AND 23 MAY 2013

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'For a social dimension of European Economic and Monetary Union' (exploratory opinion)

(2013/C 271/01)

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Co-rapporteur: **Mr DASSIS**

On 24 January 2013, the President of the European Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on

For a social dimension of European Economic and Monetary Union

(exploratory opinion).

The subcommittee on the social dimension of European Economic and Monetary Union, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 23 April 2013 by a majority with one vote against.

At its 490th plenary session, held on 22 and 23 May 2013 (meeting of 22 May), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 161 votes to 50 with 47 abstentions.

1. Summary of proposals

1.1 **European Economic, Social and Political Union** is still to be achieved. Monetary Union was launched with insufficient economic and social dimensions, but with considerable economic and social consequences. Moves towards financial, fiscal and banking union are now in motion, but without the consequent EU budgetary means for an accompanying policy to support economic growth and social cohesion. At the same time, progress towards social and political union remains blocked. However, Economic, Monetary and Social Union are all mutually dependent; they sustain and amplify each other. Together, they should offer a more tangible Europe rooted in real lives, to which citizens can relate and which investors, producers, workers and consumers can have confidence in

and ownership of, a more dynamic Europe for leveraging up competitiveness, smart and inclusive growth, economic opportunity, employment and effective enjoyment of all social rights. Without such a balance, there will be no future for a Political Union.

1.2 Between 2008 and February 2013, the unemployment rate of the EU-27 has risen from 7 % to 10,9 %, a total of 26,4 million unemployed, while that of the eurozone has reached as high as 12 %; it has risen in 19 countries and fallen in 8; 5,7 million young people are now unemployed in the EU-27 (23,5 %), while at the beginning of 2013 the overall unemployment rate in the USA was 7,7 % and in Japan

4,2 % ⁽¹⁾. These figures run entirely counter to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the EESC therefore believes that it is a matter of the utmost priority to tackle our declining competitiveness, to generate more growth, create new jobs and reduce poverty. It is essential to set up a strengthened surveillance mechanism on the impact of economic and monetary policies on the social situation and on the labour market in the Member States, and that social and employment policies should be added to the provisions subject to surveillance of national economic policies as part of the European Semester. The EESC believes that a similar approach is not just urgent in view of the these dramatic figures, but is also fully in compliance with Article 9 of the TFEU regarding the Union's social and sustainable development objectives. The social dimension of the EMU needs clear instruments, indicators and qualitative and quantitative objectives that are as effective as the economic and financial obligations of the EMU. More than anything else, it is for the EU leaders to bring the European ideal close to the people again.

1.3 A new **European Social Action Programme** should be launched to accompany moves towards closer financial, banking and fiscal union. The programme should set out clear **tangible targets**, both qualitative and quantitative, based on and improving those already set for **Europe 2020**, especially to support efforts to re-industrialise Europe, **reduce and eradicate mass unemployment, ensure fundamental social rights, promote entrepreneurship and new jobs, combat poverty, sustain social inclusion, facilitate social investment, promote higher education and training, and develop social governance and participatory ownership** of the European project. The new European Social Action Programme should be activated by non-legislative and legislative actions, whichever works best, throughout the EU or through enhanced cooperation. It should jointly encompass the **European stimulus package, European Social Investment Package, European Social Impact Assessments, European Youth Guarantee and Single European Skills Passport**, and ensure respect for the **Horizontal Social Clause, fundamental social rights and civic participation**. The programme should also explore and promote the right of European citizens to a minimum guaranteed income.

1.4 The EESC would propose **two new exploratory initiatives**: 1) the issuance of **European Social Bonds** for financially viable social investment projects, to be channelled

through a **European Social Action Fund**, facilitated by the competent EU authorities, but financed, owned, managed and supervised transparently by civil society stakeholders (private, corporate and public); and 2) the setting-up of a **European Education Network for Unemployed Workers**, offering long-term, efficient, qualitative educational opportunities matching labour market needs, through the issuance of **cross-border education vouchers** and ERASMUS-type course credit exchange schemes to assist unemployed workers towards new educational horizons, to develop new cognitive and professional skills and to open new career paths and reinsertion in the European labour market. At the same time, a Europe of free movement requires a more secure and updated basis for mobility, (for example, proper rights on information and assistance for those working in other members states) in order to facilitate the movement of intra-community populations in search of work throughout the EU, ensuring a level playing field of fair competition and respect of basic social rights and collective agreements.

2. Economic governance requires a social dimension

2.1 The European Economic and Social Committee is on record in calling for a comprehensive *step-up* towards **Economic, Social and Political Union**.

2.2 An **Economic Union** should include a **financial and banking union**, with a common deposit guarantee scheme, a common resolution fund and EU-wide supervision; and a **fiscal union** should be based on joint debt instruments, within a framework of budgetary discipline, fiscal consolidation and a more **dynamic European growth model**, to which citizens can relate and in which investors, producers, workers and consumers can have confidence. Continuing uncertainties on the integrity of the euro area should be overcome, as they are detrimental to people's trust and business confidence. The June 2012 summit, including the **compact for growth and jobs** and the planned leveraging of EUR 180 billion for this purpose, together with ECB announcements to *do whatever it takes* to break the viscous circle between weak banks, sovereign debt and unsustainable spreads, are reasons to have more confidence in the developing European economic framework. Europe needs a new investment programme ⁽²⁾ to leverage resources to support reindustrialisation, restore growth and tackle unemployment.

⁽¹⁾ Eurostat data, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/euroindicators>

⁽²⁾ A kind of new Marshall plan: see EESC opinion on 'Growth and sovereign debt in the EU: two innovative proposals', OJ C 143, 22.5.2012, points 2.8 and 2.13 – See the Commission Green Paper on the Long-term financing of the European Economy, COM(2013) 150 final/2 of 9.4.2013.

2.3 But this is only half the picture. At the same time, the consequences of austerity measures have had a devastating effect on social cohesion, social protection, an inclusive labour market and poverty levels. There are now 26 million unemployed and 120 million people experiencing poverty or social exclusion in the EU. The goals of economic revival, monetary stability, sustainable growth and competitiveness will not be achieved without a renewed social dimension. **The European Spring Council meeting of 14-15 March 2013** at last recognised this reality and called on Member states to **include 'social policies as drivers of economic governance', notably by changing the focus of the European Semester** to support employment, social investments, social inclusion and the mainstreaming of social targets⁽³⁾. The European Economic and Social Committee takes note of this new emphasis on social policy at national level, but considers that an EU-wide lead is also necessary in terms of social action, social investment and social benchmarking.

2.4 It is time, therefore, to **build the social pillar of the EMU** within the framework of a social Europe, without which citizens' adhesion to the European project as a whole will remain at risk. Indeed, the current 'spreads' in European social imbalances not only undermine sustainable solutions for economic growth and social cohesion, they also pose a fundamental challenge in the upcoming 2014 European elections between those who look towards a European dimension for recovery and those who fall back on national alternatives. The European elections will concentrate minds and votes; it is essential that these elections act as a springboard for, not as a brake on, **more Europe, a Europe closer to its citizens, families and companies, a more social Europe**.

2.5 **Fundamental social rights** are indivisible from civil and political rights, and there is a Treaty obligation to uphold and promote them. The Commission and the ECB, as members of the Troika, have to abide by fundamental social rights' obligations in all their activities. In the framework of the social dimension of EMU, the Commission should efficiently monitor, evaluate and ensure full compliance with these fundamental social rights' obligations.

3. Towards a new European Social Action Programme and Social Investment Pact

3.1 In 2008, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an exploratory opinion, requested by the French EU Presidency and proposing the need to launch a new **European Social Action Programme**. The opinion referred to the pioneer work of the Committee in helping to launch the Community

Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, the 1989 European Social Action Programme and the resulting social acquis relating to the single market, the Treaty and EU activity in general. The opinion argued that a new European Social Action Programme was needed **'so that EU social developments can keep pace with economic and market developments'**. Sadly, despite the support registered at the informal Ministerial meeting for Employment and Social Affairs during the French EU Presidency, the Committee's proposal was soon eclipsed by the economic crisis and five frantic years in trying to save the EMU and forge closer economic cohesion in the eurozone. The time has surely come to revisit the idea of a new European Social Action Programme, in order to catch up with and sustain the new forms of economic governance with equivalent social cohesion and social policy action.

3.2 In its 2008 opinion, the Committee called for **'multilevel governance'** of a new European Social Action Programme, based on legislative action, social dialogue, civil dialogue, co-regulation and self-regulation, open coordination, social policy mainstreaming, enhanced cooperation and the citizens' right of initiative. It placed no hierarchy in the form of action, only in the sense of what worked best, with the maintenance of the **Community Method** and with respect for the new horizontal **social clause** (Article 9, TFEU). It also called for financial commitment, for example through more focused and accessible use of the European Social Fund, a possible European Social Innovation Fund to support new social initiatives of an experimental character, and the idea of a 'European wide loan facility for social infrastructural development'.

3.3 In the intervening period, the Committee has stepped up its calls to apply the *Community Method* and to respect the binding nature of the horizontal *social clause*. It has also specifically proposed the launching of a **European Social Investment Pact** to ensure that austerity measures and semi-automatic sanctions in the framework of economic governance and the implementation of the European semester are offset by social impact assessments, respect for fundamental social rights, real commitment to meeting the EU 2020 anti-poverty targets and the general development of European **'social governance'**.

3.4 The Committee is encouraged that the European Parliament recently stressed **the need for a 'social pact for Europe'**, for 'employment and social benchmarks' in the 'binding supervision of budgetary discipline', for the Annual Growth Survey to take account of the 'sustainability of the

⁽³⁾ European Council Conclusions of 14/15 March 2013, EUCO 23/13.

social model' and for an **'integrated employment and social policy framework'** as a **'fifth building block' in the EMU roadmap** ⁽⁴⁾. It also welcomes the European Council's objective to present measures and a time-bound roadmap for 'the social dimension of EMU' at its meeting in June 2013 ⁽⁵⁾. Commissioner Andor has likewise recently highlighted the need for a 'monetary union with a human face' and that in his view 'the social dimension of the EMU must be understood as the ability of the EMU's rules, governance mechanisms, fiscal capacity and other policy instruments **to ensure that economic efficiency and social equity are pursued at the same time** ⁽⁶⁾.' The Committee is also encouraged by President Van Rompuy's conclusions at the 14 March Tripartite Social Summit that 'the European social model remains an important asset and a global competitive advantage' and that **'we need to find mechanisms to help reduce social divergences in our Union** ⁽⁷⁾.' The 'Social Investment Package', published by the Commission, setting out guidance to Member States to support social protection and social inclusion ⁽⁸⁾, goes in the direction of developing social dimension indicators. However, the Committee considers that a 'scoreboard' of employment and social imbalances in the EU also requires a more committed framework for EU-wide action. The Committee therefore reiterates the need for a comprehensive, pro-active **European Social Action Programme** with multilevel governance, including the competent **European** authorities, bodies and stakeholders concerned both in legislative and non-legislative action, and with the mission to at least meet and preferably improve on the social targets set out in the Europe 2020 strategy.

4. Specific proposals

The EESC supports the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy stressing the importance of tackling our declining competitiveness, generating more growth, creating more jobs and reducing poverty. In keeping with Article 9 of the TEU, namely 'the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health', the Committee calls for a more

binding and properly financed **EU-wide programme of social action and commitment** including the following specific objectives.

4.1 The European Semester exercise must include **employment and social inclusion benchmarks** within the same **surveillance framework** as that governing economic policy coordination and structural reforms. **Quantifiable European employment and social targets** must match and be integrated with stability and growth rules governing debt and deficit targets. Consequent **adjustment mechanisms** should be applied to reduce both macroeconomic and **social imbalances**, with the objective to promote smart, sustainable growth, quality jobs, access to high-quality affordable services of general interest and the reduction of social inequalities throughout the EU. Short-term economic efficiency must not be at the expense of longer-term **investment in social capital**. Fiscal consolidation measures must be evaluated by their effects on growth, employment and social inclusion. **European solidarity mechanisms** should accompany structural reforms. In order to ensure that a genuine economic and monetary union is supported by the EU citizens, national reform programmes need to be **secured with proper social and civil dialogues and within a European social dimension dynamic** which does not trigger a *race to the bottom* resulting in downwards competition, wage deflation and lower aggregate demand. **Free and autonomous collective bargaining must be guaranteed. European social dialogue** should play an essential role in the development and the practice of the new economic governance. **EU-wide fundamental social rights must be better monitored and respected.**

4.2 The European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund must be raised to a level commensurate with what President Van Rompuy has termed the 'human tragedy and social emergency' ⁽⁹⁾ of the European employment and social situation. This will clearly require 'a compulsory and comprehensive revision of the MFF' as demanded by the EP resolution of 13 March ⁽¹⁰⁾. In the framework of the flexibility mechanisms mentioned therein, the ongoing negotiations between the EP and the Council and the highly desirable

⁽⁴⁾ European Parliament Report with recommendations to the Commission on the report of the Presidents of the European Council, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Eurogroup *Towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union* (2012/2151 (INI)), p. 29, plus accompanying opinion of the EP Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, *suggestion J and recommendation 6*.

⁽⁵⁾ European Council conclusions on completing EMU, adopted on 14 December 2012, point 12b.

⁽⁶⁾ Speech of László Andor, European Commissioner responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, to the ETUC (28.1.2013, Madrid).

⁽⁷⁾ 'The focus of today's meeting, the social dimension of the European social model, remains an important asset and a global competitive advantage' – Remarks by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy following the Tripartite Social Summit, Brussels 14.3.2013, EUCO 68/13.

⁽⁸⁾ *Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020*, COM(2013) 83 final.

⁽⁹⁾ 'As a result, a growing number of people are simply leaving the labour market, abandoning any training and running the risk of marginalisation (this figure may be as high as 13 % for 15-24 year-olds). This is a human tragedy and a social emergency.' Speech by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, at the EESC, Brussels, 17.1.2013, EUCO13/13.

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2013 on the European Council conclusions of 7/8 February concerning the Multiannual Financial Framework (2012/2803 (RSP)), point 9.

structural revision of the MFF after the election of the new European Parliament, the amounts in the European Commission's initial proposal must at least be re-established, including through more appropriate use of the EU own resources provided for, and significantly increasing the resources for the territorial cohesion fund, the social fund, resources for education and training and the globalisation adjustment fund.

4.3 At the same time, the EU should better **assist socially responsible investment** and the supportive role of the **social economy**, notably through the re-introduction of European statutes for associations and mutual societies, explicit inclusion in structural fund planning of programmes for starting up and developing social enterprises, facilitating social labelling and compensatory measures and public procurement facilities for enterprises with confirmed social value. A **European Social Innovation Fund** should also be created in order to restore valuable transnational pilot projects aimed at tackling discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market, which were undermined when the European Commission abandoned the *Equal* programme.

4.4 It is also crucial to take all the necessary actions and employment measures to **re-industrialise** Europe and achieve the target of 20 % of GDP in industry by 2020. The EESC stresses the importance of **competitiveness** for companies, which needs to be achieved through a coherent **European framework**.

4.5 The EU must get *on the move for youth*, or risk permanently alienating young people from the European project as a whole. The dramatic scale of the **youth unemployment crisis** in Europe requires a more credible EU budget than the inadequate EUR 6 billion proposed for the **European Youth Employment Package and Guarantee** for ensuring employment, training or education for unemployed young people especially where most needed. Without sufficient funding, the European Youth Guarantee risks being seen as a sham. A stronger EU lead should also be developed by **single European skills passport**, expanding on the European Qualifications Framework by combining all qualifications and skills in formal, informal and non-formal education. A **European framework of partnerships between schools, businesses and the social partners** is patently necessary, together with similar strategic synergies putting higher education and life-long learning at the centre of job creation, the resolution of

skills' mismatches and the promotion of employability, innovation and entrepreneurship. The European Semester must ensure that public investment in education and training is not be jeopardised by measures to cut sovereign debt and national deficits.

4.6 **Real jobs, decent work and portability of social rights must lie at the heart of a sustainable European recovery programme.** The European social model is an asset for attracting inward investment and business development in Europe; it should be valued by encouraging fiscal support for employment-creating activities, including micro-businesses and genuine self-employment. **Guaranteed social standards** must be upheld in EU-wide employment and labour market policies. Competitiveness and flexibility must go hand in hand with decent work and wages that are not set at levels beneath the poverty thresholds. **The European Social Partners have a special responsibility** to tackle the problem of the **working poor**, within their working programme.

4.7 **The EU must engage more seriously and tangibly in the reduction and eradication of poverty.** Indeed, the economic and social benefits to Europe of actively reducing poverty are more cost-effective than the lasting economic and social damage caused by inaction or by measures actually making poverty worse. At the very least, in the framework of the European Semester, the **Europe 2020 'flagship' commitments to take 20 million people out of poverty** must be actively pursued, not undermined by deficit reduction measures. In the first instance, this requires a better EU-wide set of indicators to measure the impact of poverty and to ensure proper monitoring and possible correction of National Reform Programmes and austerity measures that may actually exacerbate poverty and undermine recovery. The EESC is also conducting a review of **guaranteed minimum income schemes** in Member States, with the view to identifying and promoting good practice throughout the EU. It has also supported the EP's call to study and envisage a legislative proposal to introduce an adequate minimum income of at least 60 % of median income in each Member State⁽¹¹⁾. A dedicated **European Anti-Poverty Solidarity Fund** could be set up to facilitate such income support measures, as a European Semester social stabiliser adjustment mechanism. The Committee would also reiterate its proposal that 20 % of all ESF resources should be reserved for dealing with social inclusion and poverty.

⁽¹¹⁾ The EESC calls for a detailed roadmap for the implementation of the active inclusion strategies at local level. It supports the European Parliament's call for the Commission to study the impact of a legislative proposal to introduce an adequate minimum income of at least 60 % of median income in each Member State (OJ C 248/130, 25.8.2011).

4.8 **A European Accessibility Act is essential to ensure persons with disabilities of their rights to freedom of movement and access to goods, services and the built environment.** To this end, a **European Mobility Card** would be a concrete and effective tool. The Commission should also develop an **impact assessment tool on the United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'** and factor this into the European Semester process.

4.9 **Likewise, an EU methodology and framework of comparable and measurable indicators on health protection and reduction of health inequalities** should be drawn up in order to audit the situation in Member States as part of the European Semester.

4.10 **EU-wide societal benchmarks** and good practice guidelines on the reconciliation of work and family life, access to child-care services, active ageing, volunteering, housing rights and combating homelessness should also be integrated within the social dimension of the European semester.

4.11 Immigrant workers are making a positive contribution to Europe's economic development and well-being. The EU's labour immigration procedures must be legal and transparent. Legislation on immigration must respect human rights and guarantee equal treatment. The EESC believes that the EU must strengthen integration policies and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination towards immigrants and minorities.

4.12 Sustainable recovery requires more economic and monetary symmetry and more social cohesion throughout the EU as a whole. A European Social Action Programme including the specific objectives listed above would help establish a more coherent social basis for pulling together and reconnecting the EU with its citizens. A twin-track social rebalancing both of the EU and EMU is therefore preferable, respectful of subsidiarity in its dynamic sense. However, if there is insufficient consensus or political will for such a revitalised EU social dimension, the EESC would propose the option of enhanced cooperation within the EMU, with own financial resources, a supplementary Social Fund, a Social Progress Pact for Europe, based on the same democratically accountable and rigorous contractual arrangements governing economic and monetary convergence, and social standards, objectives and stabiliser mechanisms (there should be debate with social partners and civil society if and how an EMU unemployment insurance or unemployment benefit scheme as recently proposed by Commissioner Andor may be useful) matching the fiscal, budgetary and monetary stabiliser mechanisms of closer Economic and Monetary Union – EMU with a corresponding social dimension.

4.13 **Contractual obligations for competitiveness and growth**, which were discussed at the EU summit in December, have **to be democratically accountable** and should not undermine the European social market economy as set out in Article 3.3 of the TEU. It is also necessary to better define and stipulate the **solidarity mechanisms to support** the efforts of the States, which can gradually take the form of genuine financial transfers, with an initial specific budget of EUR 50-100 billion, to be funded by mechanisms similar to those of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).

4.14 In order to achieve this greater balance and correspondence with the social market economy laid down in the Treaty, the increased role of the Commissioner responsible for economic and monetary affairs within the College must be accompanied by a **strengthening of the role of the Commissioner responsible for employment and social affairs**. The increasing role of the ECOFIN Council should be also balanced with a **similar strengthening of the EPSCO Council**.

4.15 It is also urgent, in this context of European economic and social governance, with particular reference to the European Semester and the Europe 2020 strategy, for the role of both the **European Parliament and of national parliaments** to be strengthened, and for the involvement of **social partners and civil society organisations** to be extended and guaranteed at all levels of political negotiation.

5. Exploratory proposals

5.1 *European Social Bonds*

5.1.1 In parallel with the aforementioned proposals, perhaps more thought could be given to additional ways of involving European citizens, civil society and corporate stakeholders in the re-launch of European social action, namely through the mobilisation for, and issuance of, **European Social Bonds**. This would also make it possible, at a time of scant public resources, to mobilise additional resources for well-defined purposes from significant reserves of unused private savings.

5.1.2 This initiative would be separate to ongoing discussions on the EU issuance of stability bonds (to help mutualise debt) and recovery and growth bonds (as part of an EU economic stimulus package). Instead, **European Social Bonds** would not be paid for out of national exchequers or co-financed by EU budgetary mechanisms; they would be acquired and invested in by individual citizens, businesses,

trade unions, and civil society groups willing to exercise individual and corporate social responsibility by participating in a **European Social Action Fund**, financed by themselves, managed by themselves, with reasonable interest rates and on a non-for-profit basis, supervised and regulated transparently, and facilitated and underwritten to the appropriate amount by the competent EU authorities.

5.1.3 The issuance of the bonds should be **logistically facilitated by the competent EU authorities, popularly organised and mutually managed by the private, corporate and public stakeholders** who choose to participate in the scheme and take responsibility for the European Social Action Fund. They would buy, collect and invest bonds in social programmes of their choosing, preferably **in the framework of the proposed European Social Action Programme**, with the technical help of appropriate EU institutional and advisory bodies, in order to verify their financial viability and potential social impact. **Such social investments could include:** social housing; co-operative ventures and social enterprise; support for self-help groups, mutual associations, community social and health services, educational, training and re-skilling networks, social innovation, research and development; loans and partnerships for infrastructural development, agri-tourism, travel exchanges, cultural activities; charitable actions, etc.

5.1.4 Subsequent more structured plans for developing these European social bonds could be examined, such as developing a range of such bonds, promoted and managed at local and/or national level by the actors mentioned. These bonds, conforming to the criteria of the general European scheme, both in terms of objectives and in terms of management methods, would obtain appropriate European certification for participation in the general scheme and, on that basis, also possible tax relief for subscribers.

5.1.5 The **European Social Action Fund Management Board** should be composed by the stakeholders involved in the scheme, represented proportionately, according to the level of their investments in European Social Bonds, and with logistical and advisory assistance from appropriate EU bodies (including the EESC).

5.2 *European Education Network for Unemployed Workers*

5.2.1 Mass unemployment in Europe will not be resolved in the short to medium term, even if growth forecasts improve by 2014 and a Europe-wide stimulus were to start to take effect. The European labour market must become more relevant as a means for our workforce to move freely, to bring skills to where they are needed and learn skills to bring back and develop. It is essential that our workforce remains active, preferably in employment or possibly part-time employment, or, if not, in education, training and re-skilling. It is important to make sure that education is efficient, forward-looking, innovative and relevant to labour market needs. Many educational and training schemes tend to be short-term, often without sustainable job openings at the end. Older workers becoming unemployed are less likely to participate in such schemes. A longer-term approach with a European perspective could be explored, including on the basis of certain proven European best practices, such as the adult education programme carried out in Sweden from 1997 to 2002 or the dual training system in Germany and Austria. The EU could perhaps facilitate the setting up of a **European Education Network for Unemployed Workers** with the view to offering a comprehensive, two-year educational opportunity to change career path, participate in work, training or educational exchange experiences in other Member States through the issuance of **cross-border education vouchers** with course-credit transfers, and to obtain a mutually recognised professional qualification at the end.

5.2.2 This system, if provided with adequate resources and adopted widely by the Member States, in the context of precise contractual arrangements with workers joining such programmes on a voluntary basis, could make it possible to keep a significant number of long-term unemployed people in high-quality jobs who would surely not have found employment opportunities, and this would have positive effects both for the people concerned and for the overall social capital of the countries of Europe.

Brussels, 22 May 2013.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Henri MALOSSE
