

## **Regional governments and citizen mobility for study and work purposes**

Introduction to the Seminar: Lifelong learning and mobility

Earlall

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### **1. An individual right and a necessity**

Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee of the Regions and the President of the EDUC Commission, Gerd Harms, for hosting this first seminar promoted by Earlall which aims at developing cooperation between Regions in order to increase the opportunities for our citizens to gain study and work experience abroad.

Mobility within the European Union is a right of every person, but – at the same time – it represents an important complement to economic and social growth for all the European countries.

The free movement of people within the Single European Market is one of the main principles and a strategic aim of the European Union, an individual right which is essential for the creation of an area with no internal boundaries.

At the same time, the mobility of people – for study or work purposes - is a vital tool for the creation of greater and better work opportunities as it enhances the efficiency of the Single Market, benefits professional growth and the meeting of labour supply and demand.

However, all of this must happen within a picture of greater protection and safety for people who study or work and for businesses. Guaranteeing quality conditions to mobility schemes is a task which public policies need to approach at all levels and in consideration of all aspects concerning law, administration, housing, family, insurance and retirement, language barriers and the recognition of qualifications.

It is a task which needs to be dealt with by government institutions at all levels (national, regional and local) and which requires close cooperation with the social parties.

Here, our purpose is to focus our attention on how regional Governments can cooperate in order to increase the opportunities and the propensity to mobility of our citizens so as to allow them to improve their training and competences, as well as take part in work experiences abroad.

### **2. Some elements for evaluation**

The Communication of the European Commission of 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007, which defines the working lines for a “European Job Mobility Action” for the period 2007-2010, clearly illustrated the

need to apply, at all institutional levels, a working plan to reinforce the policies which support the mobility of European citizens.

The mobility of workers in Europe is still limited. However, there is data indicating a positive trend which recall the commitment of public policies:

- The steady growth of the number of “mobile” workers
- The growth of the propensity to mobility of European citizens (57% of European citizens consider it a positive phenomenon and 5.5% of European citizens claim to be willing to move to another country)
- An increasing number of young people and of qualified workers do jobs which imply the commitment to short periods of mobility abroad, and Eurobarometer has shown that 70% of young people are open to this prospect.

Up against this reality, the commitment of regional and local governments – within the limits of their institutional competences – should be oriented towards removing every type of barrier which may be an obstacle to the free movement of European Union citizens and – for what we are concerned with here – towards favouring the cooperation between Regions so as to promote educational and formative systems which encourage people’s propensity to mobility.

### **3. The objectives of the cooperation between the Regions of Europe**

The Communication of the Commission takes on the objective of “guaranteeing the political support of mobility by all the institutions at all levels” and among these it explicitly includes also regional and local Governments.

The issue does not concern exclusively the role which Regions and Municipalities may carry out at a financial level, but more in general the responsibilities which may be taken on to guarantee “fair mobility”. In this sense regional Governments are committed to applying a support policy for mobility and to cooperating with each other.

The role which Regions may take up with regard to this, the added value which a policy created by them concerning mobility can guarantee, regards four main areas.

First of all, the Regions and their cooperation at a European level may increase the guarantee of **safety** and **protection** in favour of citizens, in particular with regard to mutual guarantees that Regions can offer citizens in mobility.

Secondly, a direct commitment of the Regions can ensure a greater **quality** level of the educational conditions in which mobility is carried through. The role performed by regional and local Governments in various European countries allows them to guarantee to guests from other Regions higher levels of quality in crucial aspects of mobility such as: the possibility to choose local partners (training centres, schools, companies) which best satisfy the expectations of people in mobility, supervision of the quality of training in firms which take on people for work experience, the guarantee of conditions offered by operators specialized in the organization of mobility, and finally the Regions can open their transfer and support services including the certification of acquired competences.

Thirdly, a financial commitment of the Regions can **significantly increase the number of citizens** which approach this opportunity.

Fourthly, the political commitment of Regions can guarantee that propensity to mobility is not limited to particular categories of the population, but becomes an opportunity offered to those sectors and to those people which have to face the internalization processes of the economy. In other terms, the Regions can **integrate mobility with respect to regional development policies** guaranteeing that the people who face the global market can be prepared to do so whether they are trainees or small entrepreneurs.

#### **4. Interregional cooperation for mobility**

We have promoted this seminar because the experience which various Regions have carried through together – supported and driven also by the General Direction for Education and Culture of the Commission by means of projects such as Prevalet and Mobireg - such experiences have made us aware that in order to achieve an increase in “fair mobility” we cannot leave alone the actors committed to mobility projects.

On the contrary, Regions must know how to establish communication between their policies and their education and professional training systems, as well as their services for orientation and for work.

In order to achieve this result, various Regions have started to take on mutual commitments by subscribing to **bilateral agreements** in favour of interregional mobility. With these agreements, regional Governments define the willingness to cooperate in favour of the mobility of their citizens towards the interested Regions, the formative and working sectors in which it can be carried through, the type of support which will be guaranteed. It is a type of commitment which today involves regions such as Andalusia, Brittany, Catalonia, Wales, the Balearic Isles, the region of Pest, Tuscany, Rhône-Alpes, Västra Götaland. Other agreements are currently being prepared. It is thanks to these agreements that in the Region of Tuscany alone, during the first six months of 2008, 500 secondary school students and trainees will take part in mobility projects and this number may double during the second semester including even young graduates, researchers and entrepreneurs. However, this meeting also has another, concrete objective.

A greater political commitment of regional Governments also entails greater attention towards the condition in which mobility is carried through and the results which it can guarantee.

For this reason some Regions have started working together to guarantee transparency to the quality levels offered.

The European Parliament has already approved, on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006, a Recommendation concerning the adoption of a European Quality Charter for mobility (2006/961/EC). It is an important instrument and it is particularly useful for the organizers of mobility projects and should inspire individual actions, especially in the training area.

Interregional mobility actually needs a common instrument which helps to describe and divulgate the conditions in which each Region receives its European partners in the different sectors where mobility schemes can be developed: in schools, in apprenticeships, at post-secondary level, for young graduates or for entrepreneurs. The adoption of an instrument which gives greater

transparency to the quality levels guaranteed will be very useful for those who are involved in planning increasing flows of mobility.

For these reasons, today we are taking a route which will require our commitment during the next few months and which we hope will lead to the definition of a **Quality Charter for interregional mobility**.

And it is with this spirit that we are ready to learn about the experience of three important Regions like the Balearic Isles and Rhône-Alpes to then gather the points of view of Roberto Pella who will intervene on multilingualism, of Ute Haller Block of the European Commission, and finally conclude with the presentation of our first trace of the Quality Charter for interregional mobility.