

AER SPEECH,
PARIS, 11TH DECEMBER 2009

Dear ALL,

it's a pleasure for me to be here today and to speak to you on such an important issue. It's no mystery that labour mobility is and will more and more be a crucial issue in the future of Europe. On top of that, I still consider myself as part of the "Aer family", although I just worked in Strasbourg for half a year: but those were months in which I fully understood the importance of the regional dimension in Europe.

This is a Continent, which presents quite a significant problem in terms of youth unemployment: according to the latest Eurostat report (released in October, on the basis of the September data), about 1 out of 5 youngsters "under 25 years of age" is unemployed in Europe (EU-27), which is about four or five points more than in 2008. In comparison to the average, the youth unemployment is more than double (20% against 9.9%).

These data shouldn't alarm too much, though: the average youth unemployment rate was double the general average already one year ago.

But there are some elements, in this statistics, that should at least worry us: in the first instance the figure of young unemployed is increasing (because of the crisis, of course but... what next?) and -secondly- there are quite amazing disparities. In the Netherlands, or in Austria, youth unemployment is 6,8 and 9,9% respectively. In Spain it's 41,7%, in Latvia 33,6%.

Young people are the future of Europe, and in times of globalization, they should become the frontline of this new era. Do we want a strong Europe? Well, let's start with empowering young people, then. They are the next leaders, in a world which will be radically different from the one we know. Where Europe, the Old Continent, seriously risks a slow decline, being overtaken by China and India.

Until now, the approach which has been taken at the EU level has been quite good: but it definitely needs something more. Sometimes I joke, by saying -and you all know that very well- that the strange couple "Erasmus and Ryanair" has given such a contribution to the cause of uniting Europe, that the next EU president should provide them with some sort of official award! But that is the past, already. Times change very quickly in this new millennium.

Ryanair has introduced a travel model which has been soon followed by all the other airlines (not only the low cost ones), and Erasmus is now almost a fashion. What next?

Well, simply said, work experience: in this respect, Europe itself is not doing enough, according to my opinion. Let's have a look at the numbers, which I took from the official EU website:

*** Erasmus: for student mobility and university cooperation. Target: 3 million student mobilities by 2012.**

*** Leonardo da Vinci: for placements in enterprises abroad for trainees and young workers and trainers, and cooperation projects between vocational training institutes and enterprise. Target: 80,000 placements in 2013.**

As you see, the disparity is quite evident: 3 million students vs. 80 thousand workers.

You know, I come from a country which is hugely suffering from the so-called “brain drain”. Italy is nation where young people, the so-called “under 35 years of age” are profoundly disillusioned. That’s why I wrote a book, to denounce what I call the scandalous waste of talents. The best of our young elite, that part of society which does not want to surrender itself to the lack of meritocracy, to some “mafia-style selection of the best” in all the main fields, and who suffers in a country ruled almost only by old people (just to mention some of our main problems), simply chooses to flee this beautiful Mediterranean country.

It’s not a mass emigration, but it’s the emigration of the best educated minds, in a country where only 10% of the population has a degree. The majority of them, needless to say, are young people in their 20s or 30s. At the top of the society stand fiercely those old and uneducated people, who don’t have a clue of what means globalization.

You might say: great! A real mobility. I add: no, this is a shame! The real mobility is when there is a real circulation of talents and skills. Italian professional go to work to France, or Spain, or the UK, especially in their first career years, and then eventually come back, bringing with them a true European spirit and know-how.

At the same time, Spanish, or French, or British professionals come to Italy, where - in my ideal world- they should be able to find a truly European environment, where to work and operate. In this respect, I think that Europe still suffers from a big North-South divide, with Italy, Greece and Portugal scoring the worst points. This is a barrier that should be overcome in the future, as well as the East & West divide: here we have as well a cultural barrier, which might take some more time to collapse, but I’m quite optimist anyway in this respect.

Now, to get to the point: what Brussels needs to understand is that a new and more courageous step must be taken: after the big Erasmus success, we need a big Leonardo success. Numbers have to increase there: Europe must help both entrepreneurs and workers to develop a new mobility era. The Erasmus success must be translated into a Leonardo or “Programme X” success. Now is the time to forge a real European society, built on the work mobility of the young elite. Of course most of these youngsters will probably return to their home country after a few years... but imagine what kind of experience and know how they will bring along! Imagine what sort of open mind will have, by then! That’s why I say: “Europe, don’t be shy!”

Massimo D’Azeglio, a historic Italian Marquis [markuas], said once a sentence, which made history: “We made Italy, now let’s make the Italians!”. I would now update it with a “We made Europe, now let’s make the Europeans!” And how can we “make” them? By involving the young Europeans in this new challenge of labour mobility and brain circulation, of course.

And here come the regions, and of course the AER: so far, at the EU level regions have too much been considered as a sort of passive beneficiaries. Not as active “actors”: billions and billions of euros have so far been awarded to European regions, in order to level the differences and contribute to their development.

But this Europe is still too much ruled and managed by national countries: they decide the policies, they decide the amount of money to be spent and who will benefit. But this Europe needs to understand that the real Europe can be found in the regions. That many policies can be more effective, if managed in cooperation with the regions: so why can't we imagine, just to make an example, a cooperation between Leonardo and Eurodyssey? Why can't we imagine a two-level approach, EU-run and Regions-run, in coordination? The result would be more exchange, better placements, more involvement on the side of national and regional authorities... and of course more interest on the side of the same businesses. This would result in an expansion of placements' possibilities around Europe, and in a notable shift of approach, from our beloved but now insufficient Erasmus programme, to a more than necessary “Euromobility” programme.

To you, my young friends, I finally say: do not stop asking to become more and more involved in the active building of Europe.

And to you, regional actors, I ask: do not stop claiming your right and active place in the management of our common home, Europe.