

## The EU Integration Forum (EUIF)

### *The EUIF 2014*

The EU Integration Forum is a ground breaking initiative launched by the Robert Bosch Stiftung to bring together some 100 young leaders from all 28 EU Members States and all levels of government once a year to debate the challenges facing the European Union, and to create an EU-wide network of young leaders and thinkers committed to helping shape the Union's future. Now in its fourth year, the Forum has demonstrated its value as a highly interactive platform for exchanging views on the key issues facing the EU now and in the future, when Europe will be looking to this younger generation to provide the leadership and vision so desperately needed to meet the many serious challenges confronting us.

This year, the Forum will focus on how best to tackle youth unemployment, amid mounting fears of a 'lost generation', with potentially devastating social consequences, especially in countries hit hardest by the crisis. This could, in turn, have serious repercussions for the Union, potentially fuelling a dramatic fall in support for European integration if young people see the EU as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to the challenges they face.

The Forum's unique approach brings together young leaders from the political, business, policy and think tank worlds, and from across the EU and every level of government from the local and regional to the national and European. If you feel addressed and have gained some professional or practical experience with the this topical issue then seize the opportunity and sign up up for this year's EUIF under [www.euif.eu](http://www.euif.eu) from April 2014. This highly interactive format will give participants the opportunity to exchange views on this hugely important issue and to learn from each other's experience about how best to deliver effective policies and strategies to tackle it.

The EU Integration Forum moves around the Union every year as part of its mission to promote genuine transnational dialogue. The first gathering of these rising stars in the EU's political firmament took place in 2011, when participants discussed whether there was a need for a new 'pact' to reconnect the EU with its citizens. The 2012 Forum focused on whether the emergence of a two-speed Europe was inevitable in the wake of the euro-zone crisis and what implications this might have for the EU's future. In 2013, participants discussed Europe's place in a rapidly changing world and how to ensure it can



punch its weight on the international stage.

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The first two meetings were held in founding EU Member States, Germany and Italy. In 2013 the Forum moved eastwards to a relatively new Member State, the Czech Republic. This year, it will be held in the Spanish city of Barcelona, in a country which currently has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the EU.

## ***Theme of the 2014 EUIF***

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### ***Europe's 'lost generation' - how to combat the scourge of youth unemployment?***

The economic and financial crisis has hit the younger generation particularly hard, with unemployment among the under-25s more than 2.5 times higher than among the adult population as a whole, rising to close to 60% in some EU countries. While there are signs that the EU is now gradually emerging from the crisis, with the first 'green shoots' starting to appear, many experts fear we could be heading for years of stagnation similar to Japan's lost decade, with stubbornly low economic growth and persistently high unemployment.

The crisis has also opened up deep divisions between EU Member States, with tensions fuelled by big differences in youth unemployment rates across the EU, ranging from less than 10% in Germany and Austria to over 55% in Greece and Spain. This has sparked an often angry debate about the need for 'solidarity' between the EU's richest and poorest countries; between those hardest hit by the crisis and those that have emerged relatively unscathed. All of this is fuelling despair and a sense of hopelessness among young people and risks sparking a backlash against politicians and policy-makers at all levels, with protests like the 'indignados' movement in Spain spreading and potentially leading to more serious social unrest, and increasing support for populist and extremist political groups.

If Europe cannot help deliver solutions to this problem - working with the Member States, regions and local communities to develop and implement effective initiatives – there is real risk that this could also translate a dramatic fall in support for European integration.

The EU has already launched a raft of initiatives, from the Youth Guarantee (designed to ensure all young people get a quality job, continued education or training within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed) to funding from the Youth Employment initiative and the European Social Fund, and measures designed to foster labour mobility. However, primary responsibility for employment and social policies lies with the Member States, and it is Europe's regions and localities that are in the 'frontline' in dealing with these issues.

So, what role can and should the EU play in addressing this issue and what can and should be done by national governments, regional and local authorities, businesses and civil society organisations? How effective have the measures introduced so far been in helping to provide answers to a problem that risks tearing the social fabric of Europe apart, and how can policy-makers

and stakeholders at all levels of governance work best together to deliver effective solutions? page 4

These are the key questions that delegates will be discussing at the 2014 EU Integration Forum in Barcelona on 29-30 September.

## ***Programme for the 2014 Forum***

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### **Day One**

**Pre-conference workshops:** Before the conference begins, participants will be invited to attend workshops designed to showcase successful projects and share experiences about what works best, what obstacles need to be overcome to develop and deliver effective initiatives, and how to build on these best practice examples. If possible, these workshops will be organised by civil society organisations working 'on the ground' in Barcelona.

**Conference reception and dinner:** The conference will start with a dinner to welcome participants and launch the debate with a keynote speech - ideally by a Minister from the host country - to outline what they are doing to tackle youth unemployment, what others can learn from their experience, and what role (s)he believes the EU can and should play in addressing this issue. This will be followed by a short informal debate with participants over dinner to provide some initial food for thought for the next day's discussions. This will be an 'on the record' session with journalists invited to cover the speech and subsequent discussion. The rest of the conference will be held under Chatham House rules to allow for a frank and open exchange of views.

### **Day Two**

**Opening plenary:** The 90-minute discussion in the opening plenary will set the stage for the break-out sessions. It will start with a 10-12 minute opening presentation, ideally by an EU expert on employment issues who can set the context for the debate by outlining what the Union is currently doing in this area and give some examples of initiatives being taken in individual EU countries and regions. This will be followed by a highly interactive, television-style debate between a panel of 4-5 speakers, which will include the opening speaker, representatives of the different layers of the EU's multi-level governance system and a speaker from a youth organisation, with questions from the moderator to kick start the discussion followed by comments and questions from the audience.

**Break-out sessions:** Parallel break-out sessions before and after lunch will explore this issue in more detail and in smaller groups to give as many participants as possible the chance to contribute to the debate. Speakers drawn from amongst the participants and the opening plenary session will make short impulse statements to launch a highly interactive discussion. Expert facilitators will be tasked with moderating the break-out sessions and will be

given a set of key questions to address (see below). A rapporteur in each group will be tasked with preparing a summary of the discussion to be presented at the closing plenary session.

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The break-out sessions will start by addressing some broad questions about the role of policy-makers in tackling youth unemployment and what should be done at the different levels of governance within the EU, and then focus on some specific issues to make the discussion and outcomes as concrete as possible.

General questions to be addressed include:

- What can policy-makers do to create the best possible environment to enable the private sector to create the jobs Europe desperately needs to cut unemployment and give young people the best possible chance of filling those vacancies?
- What role should the different levels of governance – European, national, regional and local – play in this?
- What needs to be done to ensure a coordinated and coherent response to maximise the impact of the initiatives taken at the different levels of governance?
- What can be done to reverse the widening gap between countries hit hardest by the crisis and those which have emerged relatively unscathed, given the dramatic difference in youth unemployment levels across the Member States?
- What will the consequences be for the EU and its Member States if policy-makers cannot deliver effective responses to this problem, and if the EU is perceived to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution?

More specific issues which could be addressed include:

- How effective have EU, national and regional responses to this issue been to date, and what have we learnt about what works best, what does not, etc?
- What can countries learn from each other about how to address this issue? Can successful initiatives be replicated across the EU or are tailor-made approaches essential given the specific circumstances in different countries and regions?
- What measures are most effective in helping young people make the transition from formal education to the world of work, and between jobs? (What role, for example, can concepts like flexicurity play in helping to manage these transitions?)
- There are some 2 million job vacancies in Europe, despite record unemployment levels. What needs to be done to address the skills 'mis-

match' to ensure young people are equipped with the skills employers require to fill those vacancies? page 7

- How can policy-makers work most effectively with the private sector and civil society organisations on this issue, and how important are such partnerships to develop successful approaches?

**Feedback session:** In the closing feedback session, the rapporteurs of the break-out sessions will give 3-4 minute presentations on the discussions in the workshops on the basis of some pre-defined questions, followed by an open debate with the floor to discuss the outcomes, led by the moderator. The discussions will be summarised in a report to be produced after the Forum and distributed to participants.