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## Speech

Brussels, 10 May 2017

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**ECA conference on Youth Employment**

**Confronting Challenges and Finding Solutions**

**Brussels, 10 May 2017**

Check against delivery.  
The spoken version shall take precedence.

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Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of Parliament,

Distinguished guests,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to welcome all of you today in the premises of the European Parliament for this high level conference which brings together politicians, officials, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders on this very important topic of youth employment.

I remain convinced that forums of this kind provide a podium for discussions and allow decision makers to gather precious ideas for more efficient and effective EU policy. Involvement of social partners and public society is also crucial in this respect.

There is no doubt that young people in many EU Member States experience serious difficulties to find a job.

It is not a new phenomenon, but the economic and financial crisis has made this situation worse. While the statistics had improved since the pick in 2013, more than 4 million young people below 25 were unemployed in the European Union in January 2017.

This alarming situation could have serious consequences in terms of lower future employability, increased risk of poverty, social exclusion and ultimately negatively impacts the economic growth and productivity in the countries concerned.

Young people should be helped and not be left alone.

EU institutions, together with Member States had to act, and to act quickly in a situation of emergency.

And this is how the Youth Guarantee was born. Based on a Council recommendation, its objective is to ensure that nobody is left alone and that all young people who are not in employment, education or training or the so called NEETs are reached in a systematic way. In addition, as part of the overall ESF programming the Council and the Parliament agreed to establish the Youth Employment Initiative to increase the financial support to regions and individuals that struggle most with youth unemployment.

We as the European Court of Auditors, also contribute to this very important topic of youth employment, by providing decision makers and all EU citizens with a series of audit reports on the topic. In 2015, we have published an early assessment of the design of the Youth Guarantee, flagging risks to its implementation.

The same year we have also analysed a different initiative of the European Commission aiming at helping young people through Youth action teams. Another important report published a year later, focused on the of EU education objectives embedded in the operational programmes.

Our most recent report, published few weeks ago, assessed whether the Youth Guarantee was delivering results in the Member States and whether the Youth Employment Initiative was contributing to it. It provides an overview of the situation “on the ground”, highlights the achievements of the initiatives and identifies the remaining challenges ahead.

Allow me to focus on some of its conclusions.

We conclude that progress in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee has been made in the seven visited Member States.

We note a number of positives developments that were triggered by the Youth Guarantee in the different visited Member States such as:

- The creation of integrated monitoring systems- allowing developing evidence based policies and interventions and ultimately ensuring the efficient use of resources.
- New profiling systems – helping job centres to better identify the most suitable services/offers for individuals.
- Definition of “good quality offer” which is an important element in view of the sustainable integration on the labour market.

But, we should not forget that EU had to act fast in urgency and, therefore, has set up the Youth Guarantee through soft law- a Council recommendation. This situation led to a number of challenges relating to the implementation in the Member States such as:

- Lack of strategies with clear milestones and objectives to reach all NEETs;
- No assessment of cost and available funding by Member States;
- Difficulties with the sustainable integration of NEETs;
- The weak quality of data.

The establishment of the Youth Guarantee created expectations that all young people under 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed.

Our analysis shows that so far we are still far from reaching all young people.

Policymakers should make sure that EU policy does not raise expectations that could not be fulfilled. This is particularly critical for young people.

This fact is also acknowledged in the whitepaper of the European Commission on the future of Europe which states that there is a mismatch between expectations and the EU's capacity to meet them.

In this period of populism and scepticism, I would like to stress that our analysis should be considered as a call for improvement and not as a criticism of the policy as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

57% of young people in Europe feel marginalised by the economic crisis and excluded from the economic and social life, according to the 2016 Eurobarometer survey.

Europe has no time to lose. Young people have no time to lose.

The European Union should act and more than ever show its commitment to deliver to its citizens. Youth Guarantee is an important tool in this regard, but could not be a panacea. This complex issue needs a holistic approach.

To create sustainable jobs youth employment measures should go hand in hand with economic growth and improved link between businesses and education.

I would like to express my gratitude to the European Parliament and its President, Mr. Tajani for actively supporting this event and allowing us to use the facilities of the institution. I would also like to thank the Commission and all participants for their involvement. Finally I would also thank all ECA services and fellow Members who helped with the organisation of the conference.

Thank you for your attention.