

Five minutes with Graham Watson, Member of the European Parliament for South West England: Investments in infrastructure are crucial to create jobs for the young.

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More than 5 million young people are now unemployed in Europe. [Graham Watson](#), Member of the European Parliament for South West England reflects on how unemployment has become such a huge problem in Europe, and how it might be overcome.



Why is youth unemployment now such a huge problem in Europe?

Many countries in Western Europe have pursued policies which favoured those in work keeping their jobs at the expense of those who are not in work. Greece and Spain are certainly the two countries that have done the least to reform their labour market economies. It is a strange sort of protectionism in the workforce. Fortunately, in the United Kingdom youth unemployment is much less of a problem than it is on the continent. We have not followed those policies with the result that youth unemployment is lower. But the quality of many jobs here open to young people is not what it should be. That remains a problem which is difficult to tackle.

Many commentators call for higher education to be based on the demands of the labour market. Is this a necessity to reduce youth unemployment?

I studied languages. Not quite what the labour market demands, many people would say. But I have never had a problem finding a job. I think we have to be very careful here. There is the danger that if all of your university degrees are vocational that you will lose the diversity of thoughts. That is why there is a benefit in allowing people to study classical literature – if that is what they wish to do. But what should be available all over Europe though is the kind of vocational training that people seek who are not necessarily interested in university education.

What can the European Parliament do to create jobs for the young?

I believe investments in infrastructure are crucial. The European Union will be spending about €35 billion in the next five years on public transport, for instance. Another ten billion Euros will be invested in the development of super-fast broadband Internet. This allows people to get their products and services to the market. We will be spending another ten billion on energy distribution networks. And this will lead to a rapid take-off of renewable energies which will create many jobs. Green growth is a huge opportunity. One of my brothers who was out of work is actually now running a company installing solar panels.

What do you think will happen if youth unemployment is not tackled rapidly?

A core problem is that many young people have been out of work for a long time already. They get out of the habit of work. They develop lifestyles which are different and that makes it even harder for them to find employment. It is a vicious circle. And all of history has taught us that if you have large number of

people unemployed for a long time then you risk political upheaval. This is a danger for countries such as Greece and Spain.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUOPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the author

Graham Watson - *Member of the European Parliament for South West England*

Graham Watson has served as a Member of the European Parliament for South West England since 1994. He was the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) between 2002 and 2009 and he was the first British Liberal Democrat ever to be elected to the European Parliament. Born in Rothesay, Scotland, in 1956, Graham pursued a degree in Modern Languages at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. He is a qualified interpreter who speaks four European languages.



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