**Press Release**

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**EU decision-makers, industry leaders and students from across Europe debate youth employment in European Parliament**

The European Parliament was the setting for a unique debate on youth employment yesterday. The event brought together a range of high-level speakers coming at the topic from different angles – from MEPs and senior Commission officials focussed on promoting best practices in education policies across Europe, to industry leaders looking to help lift Europe out of the current employment crisis and, last but by no means least, seven young speakers from across Europe facing the challenge of finding a job in a difficult economic climate.

The event was organised by PlasticsEurope, the association of plastics manufacturers in Europe, in close collaboration with EU40 - the network of young MEPs who were 40 or under 40 at the time of their election.

In an innovative format, six MEPs spent half a day playing the role of coaches to students from their home countries to prepare them for a two hour debate with high-level panellists, including Koos Richelle, Director General, DG Employment and Social Affairs (speaking on behalf of European Commission President José Manuel Barroso), Emma McClarkin MEP, Patrick Thomas, CEO Bayer MaterialScience and President PlasticsEurope, Daniele Ferrari, CEO Versalis.

The debate was moderated by Katarina Nevedalova MEP who steered discussions expertly from practical challenges facing young jobseekers today to potential solutions for industry leaders and politicians to consider. Drawing from her own experience, she said that “in Slovakia we face the problem of young people studying many unusual social sciences, where they obtain skills which are hardly transferable to real life situations. Most of Slovak college students expect to be unemployed after they finish their study.”

This lead to central element of the debate, of whether young people now needed to look outside Europe for opportunities; the general consensus being that Europe possesses unique assets and resources that continue to place it *“at the heart of innovation”* in the words of Patrick Thomas.

The challenge according to Koos Richelle, is that *“Europe is not a learning society”* and we need to get better at learning from both our mistakes and the success of others. This thinking would shape decisions on how best to allocate the 6 billion EUR that have recently been committed to the EU’s Youth Employment Initiative over the next three years.

He insisted that *“mobility and flexibility”* were the most important skills that the young people need today when entering the job market.

Commenting on the initiative, Patrick Thomas, CEO Bayer MaterialScience and President PlasticsEurope said: “PlasticsEurope is deeply committed to working for, and with, the youth of Europe, stimulating discussions on how to ensure a sustainable future for generations to come. This industry seeks to create the right opportunities for young people entering the job market in these challenging economic times, so that we are able keep our best talents here in Europe.”