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European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/602

Erasmus

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

**Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing
"Erasmus": the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing
Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013
[COM(2018) 367 – 2018/0191 (COD)]**

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Referral	European Parliament, 14/06/2018 Council, 21/06/2018
Legal basis	Article 165(4), 166(4) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship
Adopted in section	26/09/2018
Adopted at plenary	17/10/2018
Plenary session No	538
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	186/3/1

1. Conclusions and recommendations

The EESC:

- 1.1 welcomes the next Erasmus programme's objective to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to face social and economic challenges and to focus primarily on young **European citizens**;
- 1.2 expects that the future Erasmus programme will consider **education and training from a holistic perspective**, where key competences¹ and basic skills play a crucial role alongside continuous upskilling as part of lifelong learning, with special focus on validation and recognition;
- 1.3 suggests that the name remain unchanged and that **the name "Erasmus+"** be retained, as the latter symbolises the fact that all the programmes are contained under one umbrella;
- 1.4 welcomes the proposal to double the programme's budget, but calls for it to be **tripled**, which would show a deeper commitment to the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in order to ensure real inclusiveness and access for all;
- 1.5 finds that a higher budget should be combined with greater **flexibility and responsibility at national level**;
- 1.6 highlights the fact that the actions under the youth chapter were previously the most successful in reaching out to those with fewer opportunities and that this should be reflected in the allocation of funding;
- 1.7 requests that **Discover EU** should contain a strong learning component if it is to be a part of the programme;
- 1.8 stresses that the physical experience should not be eclipsed by **virtual tools** or replaced by them but must remain complementary to such tools;
- 1.9 agrees with the increased number of objectives on **adult learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET)**, and suggests that the widened scope be reflected in the allocation of funding;
- 1.10 asks for a stronger focus to be placed on **cross-sector cooperation (KA2)** in the "lifelong learning approach", with a sufficient budget for implementing large-scale policy projects;
- 1.11 welcomes the **increase in budget for staff**, in particular for the mobility of teachers and trainers, to support their initial and continuing professional development;
- 1.12 welcomes the proposal's good intention to provide **small-scale grants** to support those who do not have experience of applying to the programme;

¹ [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning](#). Key competences are defined as: [literacy and languages](#); [maths, science and engineering](#); [digital competence](#); personal, social and learning competences; civic competence; [entrepreneurship](#); and cultural awareness and expression. This also includes a comprehensive set of values, skills and attitudes for appropriate participation in democratic societies.

- 1.13 recommends giving priority in the new programme's Youth chapter to **"volunteer-led" activities and organisations** instead of using the terminology "big" and "small". Also, **grants to large-scale European youth events** should be considered;
- 1.14 further welcomes the fact that the proposal emphasises the importance of an **independent audit body** in assessing the performance of the national agencies;
- 1.15 believes that the forthcoming programme needs to be disseminated and advocated by **career guidance** services in education and training institutions, employment services and other organisations in order to reach broader target groups;
- 1.16 finds that the proposal should encourage an **EU-level and EU-wide dissemination** of projects' results and the continuation of projects that have proved to be excellent;
- 1.17 stresses the absolute need for the **permanent committee governing the programme** to give all relevant European-level stakeholders and social partners a permanent position in its structure.
- 1.18 welcomes the youth participation activities. It is a format that was considered very successful under the youth in action (known then as youth initiatives), allowing **unorganised youth to take part** in the programme.

2.Introduction

- 2.1 Following the EU financial programme to support education, training, youth and sports via the present Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), the European Commission published the next generation of the programme under the name "Erasmus" as part of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.
- 2.2 The previous Erasmus+ programme has greatly helped to support education and training at European, national, regional and local levels, to cultivate a sense of belonging to the EU (the "European identity" in all its diversity), and to foster mutual understanding, democratic citizenship, European integration and social fairness, integration into the labour market, and consequently also economic growth.
- 2.3 The intention is that the next generation of the programme, with a doubled budget, will be strengthened and extended by reaching out to a greater number of target groups, be more inclusive, support small-scale projects and involve organisations which do not have experience in applying to the programme. It will continue to cover schools, vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning and voluntary activities, and youth and sport, but in a more streamlined manner, building on the mid-term evaluation and stakeholder consultations.

3. General comments

- 3.1 The EESC points out that quality education, training and learning mobility should be accessible to all. The new Erasmus programme's commitment to inclusiveness and equality as essential goals is crucial. Currently, statistics show that the majority of mobile higher education students come from privileged socio-economic and academic family backgrounds². The **insufficiency of Erasmus grants** provided for higher education students studying abroad and the high cost of living in another country were mentioned by 63% of non-mobile students in 2016 as being the main obstacles to participation in Erasmus exchange programmes at university level³. The programme's limited financial support has contributed to a large access gap between students from differing socio-economic backgrounds.
- 3.2 The next Erasmus programme is essential in order to strengthen mutual understanding and a **sense of belonging to the EU, to improve young people's skills and competences, thereby allowing them to act as democratic citizens** and to have better opportunities in the labour market. It is crucial in order to support inclusiveness and common European values, to foster social integration, to enhance intercultural understanding and to prevent radicalisation through the participation of young people in democratic processes, supported by **learning mobility and cooperation** between European citizens, education and training institutions, organisations, stakeholders and Member States, all of which is of paramount importance for the Union's future.
- 3.3 The EESC welcomes the next Erasmus programme's objective, to equip young European citizens as future beneficiaries with the knowledge, skills and competences needed for participating in the constantly **changing labour market**, as well as for dealing with **social, economic and environmental challenges**. This will require education systems to be modernised, made accessible and **fit for the digital age**, and learners to be better prepared to become democratically active citizens and strong candidates for quality employment and fair jobs.
- 3.4 The EESC expects that the future Erasmus programme will consider **education and training from a holistic perspective**, where key competences and basic skills, in particular "STEAM"⁴, play a crucial role alongside continuous upskilling as part of lifelong learning. Primarily, it should support democratic citizenship and common European values in order to ensure peace, security, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, solidarity and mutual respect and to contribute to open markets, sustainable growth and social inclusion and fairness, while respecting and enriching a sense of belonging and cultural diversity.
- 3.5 Concerning the policy objective, the EESC supports the fact that the regulation is based on the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**. The EESC believes that the next Erasmus programme should serve as a tool to implement the first principle of the Pillar in order to ensure that quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning are rights for all.
- 3.6 The EESC also supports the fact that the Regulation is based on the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU**⁵ in order to ensure the **right of equality and access for all**. The EESC requests that the final regulation highlight still further that equal treatment, fairness and gender balance are applicable and strengthened through the programme.

² *The Erasmus Impact Study* (2014) stated that almost two thirds of students had at least one parent working as an executive, a professional or a technician.

³ *What are the obstacles to student mobility during the decision and planning phase?*
Intelligence brief No. 02 (2016)
http://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EV_IB_mobility_obstacles.pdf.

⁴ Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).

⁵ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf.

- 3.7 While it is clear that the new Erasmus programme has considered "people with disabilities and migrants, as well as Union citizens living in remote areas", the EESC asks that the provision of **specific personal assistance and financial support** to disabled people be guaranteed in the budget allocation, respecting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)⁶.
- 3.8 **Increased financial assistance to all young people** is needed in order to support their learning mobility and to provide people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants, with more opportunities to access **quality education and training** and to promote their inclusion in society.
- 3.9 Bearing in mind that the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU** provides for the fair treatment of everyone (not only EU citizens), **migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** also need support in order to gain recognition for their education and training levels and in order to provide them with further training so that they are integrated into the EU's education system and labour market.
- 3.10 The EESC also welcomes the fact that the next Erasmus programme will focus on the implementation of the ***Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education***⁷, given that the prevention of extremism and radicalisation in Europe is now more important than ever.

4. Specific comments

- 4.1 The EESC underlines the importance of the programme's **complementarity with the political objectives and activities of the Member States and the Union**. Among the political objectives which the programme should implement are the European Education Area, the EU Youth Strategy and the future Education and Training Strategic Framework with its sectoral agendas, as well as an explanation of how the programme will support the Member States, social partners and other stakeholders in reaching the indicators and benchmarks of these future strategies.
- 4.2 The EESC calls for a **tripling of the Erasmus budget**, which would show a deeper commitment to learning mobility and the need to invest in social cohesion, European values, integration and citizenship. The new Erasmus programme will have to cover the additional policy goals, as mentioned above. Policy-makers must make sure that this will not result in unacceptably low success rates in parts of the programme, as happened in previous programmes.
- 4.3 The EESC considers that the next Erasmus programme needs to be **complementary to other Union funds and programmes**, especially to the future ESF+. At the same time, the EESC would like to emphasise that **national education, training, youth and sport budgets need to be sustainable themselves** and that the Erasmus programme budget must not be used to fill their investment gaps. The European Semester process should continue to play an active role in order to ensure fair and sustainable national investment in education, training and lifelong learning.

⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf.

- 4.4 The EESC stresses how important it is that the budget for the next Erasmus programme promotes **cooperation among Member States** to improve their education and training systems in line with democratically agreed political objectives and activities discussed and agreed by the Council and the European Parliament in consultation with the social partners and the EESC. A higher budget should be combined with greater **flexibility and responsibility at national level**. This applies to content-related objectives, such as any programme modifications made to align it with the current and future political and socio-economic developments in Europe.
- 4.5 The EESC supports the fact that the Commission's proposal will allow third countries to participate in the programme and perceives this as an opportunity for further internationalisation and as a way to strengthen cooperation between different education institutions as well as youth and sport organisations all over the world, since this will provide more opportunities for young people in partner countries to study and train in Europe and vice versa. **Easier access and sufficient administrative, financial, and social support** for these participants are needed in order to ensure a place for European education in the global education scene.
- 4.6 The EESC acknowledges the greater relevance ascribed to **tools for virtual cooperation** and agrees that options like **blended mobility**, as also highlighted in the proposal, are a great way of facilitating access to groups facing particular obstacles to physical mobility such as those living in remote areas, family-carers or people with disabilities. These tools have the potential to increase transnational cooperation and communication and to help prepare and guide future participants. However, the EESC stresses that virtual tools should not replace the physical experience and that they must remain complementary to it. Priority must be given to investment in quality physical mobility.
- 4.7 The EESC suggests that the proposal refer to bureaucratic obstacles that may arise when groups of learners with different nationalities and status want to participate in a mobility initiative, in particular, if the country of destination is a non-EU country (e.g. different visa requirements or access restrictions for different nationalities).
- 4.8 The EESC believes that **the name of the programme** is crucially important and that it is necessary to ensure that the general public has a clear understanding of what the programme supports and that it covers **all education phases and learning forms, not just higher education**, since half of the Erasmus funding goes towards the promotion of education and training, adult learning and supporting youth and sports, thus enabling young people and staff to spend a period of time abroad. However, now that the "+" sign symbolising the fact that all the programmes are placed under one umbrella will disappear from the name, the programme risks "losing" actors outside the higher education sector. The EESC therefore suggests that **the "Erasmus+" name remain**.
- 4.9 The EESC agrees with the increased number of objectives on **adult learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET)**, and suggests that the widened scope be reflected in the allocation of funding. The EESC points out that adult learning also targets **socio-economically disadvantaged people**, including refugees. Therefore the EESC is concerned that once again adult learning and support for low-skilled adults will be allocated the smallest percentage of the budget. The EESC doubts that this amount, together with the future ESF+ budget, will be sufficient to support the 70 million low-skilled adults who need to be integrated into the labour market, to retain their jobs, and to be supported in their transition between jobs.

- 4.10 While the EESC appreciates the efforts made to **increase the VET budget**, it should be noted that no particular measures are envisaged to provide higher quality, attractive, accessible and inclusive VET. At the same time, mobility for VET learners and apprenticeships must be improved (only 1% of European apprentices - the target for 2020 is 6% - are currently opting for a stay abroad during their training⁸) in accordance with the **Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship (EFQEA)**⁹, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).
- 4.11 The EESC would like to see how the "lifelong learning approach" is put into practice and believes that there should be a stronger focus on **cross-sector cooperation** (KA2), with a sufficient budget for **implementing large-scale policy projects**, given their high potential at both the national and EU level, as shown in the EESC Information Report on Erasmus+¹⁰.
- 4.12 The EESC also welcomes the increase in the budget for staff, in particular for **teacher and trainer mobility**, to support their initial and continuous professional development. The mobility of teachers, trainers and other (educational) staff is essential to help improve the quality of education and training. It also fosters essential international cooperation between education institutions and other organisations as well as their internationalisation. The EESC believes that the proposal could provide further support to teachers, trainers, other (educational) staff, university professors and researchers who need to be **replaced in their job while participating in mobility periods**. They should be supported in language learning and their mobility leave would need to be considered as part of their job and recognised continued personal and professional development.
- 4.13 The EESC believes that the next Erasmus programme needs to be disseminated and advocated by **career guidance services in education and training institutions, employment services** and engage more in media campaigns in order to reach broader target groups.
- 4.14 The EESC suggests that the regulation mention the importance of **linking budget allocation and concrete grants to strict quality assessment procedures and to a description of learning outcomes**. The proposal should also place special emphasis on the **validation and recognition of education and training abroad and online**. Thus, the proposal should make reference to the **Council Recommendation on Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning**¹¹, the **EFQEA**¹², the Bologna Process and its fundamental values and national credit systems, European tools and instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), ECVET and EQAVET.

⁸ <http://www.institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/extendingerasmus-fernandesbertoncini-june2017.pdf?pdf=ok>.

⁹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/03/15/quality-and-effective-apprenticeships-council-adopts-european-framework/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/information-reports/erasmus-mid-term-evaluation>.

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>.

¹² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/03/15/quality-and-effective-apprenticeships-council-adopts-european-framework/>.

- 4.15 The Erasmus programme is a crucial element in supporting the efforts and daily work of youth organisations, especially the support for **Non-Formal and Informal Learning** as well as the development of **Youth Work**. Therefore the proposal that the youth chapter remain a separate entity in the next programme is to be welcomed. Nonetheless, in order to reach more young people and especially those with fewer opportunities, the activities under the youth chapter are crucial in helping to reach those targets. According to the interim evaluation of the current programme, the actions under the youth chapter, which apply inclusive and non-formal learning approaches, were the most successful in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. This should be considered when funding is being allocated for the different chapters. The youth chapter should thus have access to better funding. Also, **grants to large-scale European youth events** should be considered (by offering a "per event" grant rather than "per capita" grants to such events), as this would significantly increase the number of young people reached by Erasmus+.
- 4.16 The **European Voluntary Service (EVS)** – an important part of the previous Erasmus+ programme – has now been removed. Since the activities are now to fall under the remit of the European Solidarity Corps and not Erasmus+, the links between these two programmes should be further developed and clarified.
- 4.17 The EESC is concerned about the **lack of educational components in DiscoverEU**. The core of the Erasmus+ programme is mobility and it has a strong learning component. If this is lacking then it does not belong to Erasmus+. Additionally, it is to be welcomed that young people are supported in exploring the European continent, given the added value this represents with respect to learning about different countries, people, languages, cultures, etc.. However, DiscoverEU gives the impression of being an initiative that primarily benefits privileged young people. It only covers travel costs and therefore excludes disadvantaged young people that cannot afford to travel. Furthermore, the role of youth organisations in the implementation of this action will require further explanation. To make this initiative truly meaningful and valuable it needs to have an educational component and to genuinely include all young people.
- 4.18 It is particularly necessary to **simplify and rationalise** applications to projects under the next Erasmus programme. According to the EESC Information Report on **Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation**¹³ and the social partners' research¹⁴, the **inclusiveness of all sizes and types of organisations** from all geographic areas and regions of the EU has been lacking. The EESC therefore welcomes the proposal's good intention to provide small-scale grants to support those who do not have experience of applying to the programme. Simplification, however, must ensure that mismanagement is avoided. The EESC therefore welcomes the proposal's emphasis on the importance of an independent audit body in assessing the performance of the national agencies.
- 4.19 Regarding the Youth chapter, the proposed terminology of "small" vs. "big" organisations does not correspond with the reality of beneficiaries. Instead, the EESC recommends **giving priority in the new programme to "volunteer-led" activities and organisations**, where young people play a key role in leading their own educational development. Also, local youth groups should be enabled to register as beneficiaries as independent youth groups, regardless of the national legal entity. The local youth groups should receive the guidance they need from their respective national agencies. This would help in channelling funding to initiatives by young people themselves, and reduce the risk of a large share of the funding going to the professional operators, as has unfortunately happened under the current programme and was criticised during the EESC consultations on the mid-term review.

¹³ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/information-reports/erasmus-mid-term-evaluation>.

¹⁴ ETUC – ETUCE – CEEP – EFEE: Investment in Education, 2017
https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/investment_in_education_and_training_etuc_-ceep.pdf.

- 4.20 **Dissemination and sustainability of the projects** are very important too. The proposal should encourage adequate dissemination of project results, the continuation of projects that have proved to be excellent and an EU-level and EU-wide coordinated dissemination of project outcomes.
- 4.21 **Equal-sized operating grants** should be offered to both formal and non-formal education sectors. This would strengthen complementarities and empower the non-formal education sector to provide high-quality engaging programmes. Additionally, the operating grant should be proportional to the impact reach related to the priorities of the programme and also to the operating costs of the European platforms.
- 4.22 Furthermore, the EESC believes that the next program should allow European-level projects to apply through a centralised structure, rather than national agencies. This would ensure greater access for European networks and organisations, as well as counter duplicate funding for parallel projects.
- 4.23 As the programme's budget is based on the financial contribution of EU citizens, the EESC underlines the importance of **democratic governance in the future programme** and stresses the absolute need for the permanent committee governing the programme to allow all relevant European-level stakeholders and social partners to be given a permanent position in its structure and not just an "observer status on an ad-hoc basis".

Brussels, 17 October 2018

Luca Jahier

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee