# Education and mobility: Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted a report drafted by Marielle **DE SARNEZ** (ALDE, FR) and made several amendments to the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through co-operation with third countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2009-2013). The main amendments, recommended in first reading of codecision procedure, are as follows :

**Academic excellence and geographical representation**: the programme should strive to achieve a regional balance in the support provided for partnerships with third countries, as provided for in the Annex. The programme should enhance support for the mobility of people in the field of higher education selected on the basis of academic excellence, particularly from third countries to the Community, while respecting the principles of gender equality and a balanced geographical representation and taking into account the specific needs of disadvantaged or disabled people.

**Programme actions**: these are clarified as follows :

- **Action 1: Erasmus Mundus joint programmes** (masters and doctorates) of outstanding academic quality, including a scholarship scheme. Action 1 is intended mainly for students from third countries;
- **Action 2: Erasmus Mundus partnerships** between European and third-country higher education institutions as a basis for structural co-operation, exchange and mobility, including a scholarship scheme. Action 2 is intended mainly for students from third countries. However, in the interests of mutual enrichment, mobility should also take a smaller proportion of European nationals to third countries.
- **Action 3: promotion of European higher education** through measures enhancing the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination and a centre of excellence at world level.

**Language skills**: the programme must promote language skills, providing students with the possibility of learning at least two of the languages spoken in the countries in which the higher education institutions are situated.

**Funding:** the financial framework for the implementation of Actions 1 and 3 of the programme and related technical support measures for the 2009-2013 period is set at EUR 493.69 million. The **financial framework for the implementation of Action 2** and related technical support measures should allow for the mobility of a maximum number of students from third countries selected on the basis of academic excellence in accordance with the rules and procedures laid down in the external cooperation and development instruments.

Members stipulate that for actions funded under Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 (DCI), the objectives shall be limited to those in conformity with that Regulation, particularly Article 2(4). This ensures that DCI funding cannot be used for objectives incompatible with DCI, especially any objectives or actions which do not fulfil the DCI provision requiring 100% of geographical programme funding to meet the OECD/DAC requirements for classification as ODA. The measures relating to Action 2 within the framework of partnerships shall be implemented in accordance with the rules established by the EDF, DCI, ENPI, IPA and ICI legal instruments. However, **in the case of measures funded under Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 (DCI) or the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement, actions shall only benefit institutions, academics or other persons from developing countries.**

**Tuition fees:** the Erasmus Mundus master programmes shall be free to decide whether or not to establish tuition fees, in accordance with their national legislation and the agreement concluded in each consortium. The Commission's proposal had stated that the programmes shall establish a joint tuition fee regardless of the actual place of study of the students within the masters' programme. The committee felt it essential that the fees demanded do not de facto exclude nationals of countries such as Denmark where tuition fees do not exist or are illegal. These tuition fees should be identical for all students.

The selection board must also ensure that the tuition fees proposed do not exceed certain thresholds based on the average of the tuition fees applied across the Member States.

The Commission must make sure, when determining the flat-rate amounts for the **scholarships**, to take into consideration the level of tuition fees, the estimated expenditure for the studies and costs relating to the student's stay in the destination country.

**Visas:** the students selected should be informed of their study destination at least 6 months prior to their departure, so that they can take the necessary steps to obtain their visa within a reasonable time limit. Furthermore, a new recital states that in order to ensure that the beneficiaries of the programme enjoy a high quality welcome and stay, administrative formalities should be eased and the Member States should be encouraged to look into the introduction of a **specific visa for beneficiaries** of the Erasmus Mundus programme as part of the Regulation establishing a Community Code on visas currently under consideration.

**Brain drain**: the committee's text stresses the obligation for students to return to their country of origin, as the programme should on no account allow a brain drain from third countries.

**Partnerships between universities and private firms**: the programme should support public-private partnerships between universities and enterprises, with a view to fostering excellence in research, producing innovations in both sciences and humanities and achieving the innovation objectives. The Commission must ensure that the **communication strategy** aimed at potentially interested European parties is intensified, and partnerships between universities, the social partners and non-governmental organisations are encouraged, with a view to developing the programme.

**Information portal**: the Commission shall ensure the widest possible dissemination of information on activities and developments in the programme, mainly through the Erasmus Mundus information portal. It shall keep its delegations in the third countries concerned regularly informed of all useful public information on the Erasmus Mundus programme.

**Comitology**: the general guidelines for implementation of the programme and the selection criteria will be adopted in accordance with the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. A new clause states that the Commission shall consult the European Parliament in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on budgetary discipline and sound financial management and Decision 1999/468/EC, in particular Article 8 thereof. The committee recalls that the agreement on the new external assistance instruments (ENPI, the

Instrument for Stability - IfS, and IPA) grants the European Parliament increased scrutiny over the implementation of Community assistance. The consultation process with Parliament will operate in parallel with Parliament's rights under Council Decision 1999/468/EC and in particular of Article 8, which provides that the Parliament may pass a resolution to the effect that the Commission has exceeded the implementation powers conferred on it.

**Reports**: the Commission must report on the geographical distribution of funding by actions for all participating countries, providing also an assessment of the efficiency of the implementation of actions judged against programme priorities.

The Commission must present an interim evaluation report that includes **gender-disaggregated data**, on the results achieved and on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the programme by 31 March 2011 (rather than 2012). It must present a communication on the continuation of the programme by 30 January (rather than June) 2012.

**Evaluation**: the Commission's evaluation must take account of the socio-economic background of the people concerned (both participants in the Erasmus Mundus masters courses and recipients of grants) and of potential brain-drain effects (e.g. by means of a survey carried out through the alumni network).

For actions funded under Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006, evaluation shall include follow-up with the nationals of developing countries following expiry of their periods of study or research in the Union and shall assess their subsequent contribution to the economic or social development of their country of origin.