Erasmus+

2015/2327(INI) - 02/02/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 497 votes to 39, with 60 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing ‘Erasmus+’: the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC.

In general, Members welcomed the programme’s high **educational, societal, political and economic relevance** which is reflected in the budget increase of 40 % for the programme period, and in the commitment rate of the budget provided for, which has reached nearly 100 % because of a high number of applications.

In this regard, Members recalled that Erasmus+ plays a vital role in fostering European identity and integration, solidarity, inclusive and sustainable growth, quality employment, competitiveness, social cohesion and youth labour mobility by making a positive contribution to the improvement of European education and training systems, lifelong learning, active European citizenship, and better prospects for employment, **by providing Europeans with an opportunity to acquire transversal and transferable sets of personal and professional skills**.

Parliament recalled that at a time of particular crisis with regard to the fundamental values of the EU, the Erasmus+ instrument can provide a fundamental opportunity to promote integration, understanding and solidarity among young people.

Parliament made the following finding and recommendations:

Slow first phase of the programme: Parliament recognised that, according to reports from stakeholders at all levels, while **the first two and a half years of programme implementation were difficult and challenging**. Improvements have been made in the meantime, however, having fewer bureaucratic obstacles would lead to a wider and more accessible programme. Therefore, it called for further efforts to be made to reduce bureaucracy across the project cycle and to set the costs appropriately and in relation to the budget or type of project.

Visibility of the programme: Parliament underlined that although the overall programme is more visible than its predecessor, the **different sectorial programmes still lack visibility**. It emphasised that sector-specific formats such as Grundtvig Workshops and national youth initiatives open to informal groups should be reintroduced, and transnational youth initiatives should be more easily accessible. It stressed that the **youth chapter of the programme** is the one most affected by European citizens’ increasing interest in Erasmus+. At present, 36 % of all Erasmus+ submissions are in the field of youth, with a **60 % increase in submissions between 2014 and 2016**.

Brands: Parliament considered that the long-standing brand names (Comenius, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Youth in Action) and their logos to be important tools in promoting the variety of the programme. It noted that the name of "Erasmus+" is becoming the best known, especially for newcomers. They emphasised that the programme should defend its new name “Erasmus+” and for the name "Erasmus+" to be added to the individual programmes (so they will be "Erasmus+ Comenius", "Erasmus+ Mundus", "Erasmus+ Leonardo da Vinci", "Erasmus+ Grundtvig" and "Erasmus+ Youth In Action").

School dimension of the programme: Parliament called on the Commission to **strengthen the school education dimension of the programme**, allowing for more mobility of pupils, simplification of funding and administrative procedures for schools and for non-formal education providers, thereby taking advantage of the general intention of Erasmus+ to **foster cross-sectoral cooperation**, and with a view to encouraging non-formal education providers to become involved with partnerships with schools. It recommended that **subsidy amounts in the school cooperation sector be reduced to the benefit of the number of subsidised projects**, in order to subsidise school exchanges directly and thus make more personal encounters between people of different cultures and languages possible. It underlined the significance of personal experiences with people of different cultural backgrounds with regard to the promotion of a European identity and the basic idea of European integration, and recommended attempts be made to let the **greatest possible number of people participate**.

Budget: Parliament recalled that despite the programme's significant overall budget increase, only a limited increase for the first half of the programme period has been provided for in the MFF, which has led, unfortunately, to the rejection of many high-quality projects. It welcomed the increase in funds available for the Erasmus+ programme for the year 2017 by almost **EUR 300 million compared to 2016**.

Parliament not only called for the current budget level to be secured for the next programme generation under the new MFF, but considered a further budget increase that ensures a level of annual funding for the next programme generation of at least the same level as the last year of implementation of the current framework to be an absolutely essential precondition for the continued success of the programme. It pointed out that **greater flexibility in mobility grants and administrative costs in favour of longer stays abroad** should be made possible for the national agencies.

Moreover, it stressed that grants to support the mobility of individuals within the Erasmus+ programme should be **exempted from taxation and social levies**.

Small-sized organisations: Parliament expressed regret that, owing to the high administrative burden, **Erasmus+ funding can be unattainable for smaller organisations**. It called on the Commission to significantly simplify the application procedure, and to transform the programme guide and make it more user-oriented.

It also regretted that organisations representing amateur sportspeople, and disabled sportspeople in particular, at local level are highly underrepresented as project participants in the implementation of grassroots sports projects. Members welcomed the introduction of Small Collaborative Partnerships with reduced administrative requirements and noted that the practice should be extended to other sectors of the Erasmus+ project funding, especially for volunteer organisations.

The Commission is called upon to take relevant steps to make volunteering eligible as a source of own contributions to the project budget, as this facilitates the participation of smaller organisations, especially in sport.

Recognition of international qualifications: Parliament stressed that although progress has been made in recognising study periods, credits, competences and skills through non-formal and informal learning gained abroad, these challenges remain. According to Parliament, the **recognition of international qualifications is essential to mobility** and forms the foundation for further cooperation in the European Higher Education Area.

Refugees: Parliament recalled that the Commission has shown flexibility and taken innovative steps to target new challenges, such as a proposal for refugees, and to foster civic values within the incentives

Erasmus+ offers, towards a more active and participative intercultural dialogue. It called on the Commission to recognise the special nature of projects and mobilities involving people with special needs and people from disadvantaged backgrounds and asked that their **access thereto be facilitated**.

Cross-sectoral cooperation: Parliament asked the Commission to fully exploit the lifelong learning dimension of the programme by fostering and encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation under Erasmus+, which is much higher than under the predecessor programmes, and to evaluate cross-sectoral cooperation in the programme's midterm evaluation presented at the end of 2017. It called for **educational mobility to become part of any higher or vocational education programmes** in order to improve the quality of higher education and the VET system. Parliament pointed to **Erasmus+ as an important instrument for improving the quality of VET** across the EU. It highlighted the fact that inclusive quality VET and VET mobility play a vital economic and social role in Europe, a rapidly changing labour market, as a means of providing young people and adults with the professional and life skills needed for a transition from education and training to work.

Administrative simplification: Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to increase efforts to **simplify procedures and reduce the high administrative burden for students, institutions and for host companies involved in Erasmus+ projects**. It called on the Commission and the national agencies to standardise the access criteria with a view to ensuring access for the highest number of applicants possible and to encourage the national agencies to make the available budgets per key action and per sector easily accessible following each application round in order to allow applicants to strategically plan their future actions. The Commission and the Member States are also called on to ensure that large institutions are not favoured over their smaller less well-established counterparts, in terms of programme applicants.

While welcoming the simplification introduced by the use of **lump-sum and flat-rate funding**, Parliament encouraged the Commission to look for ways to further improve the complicated administrative procedure for the applicants in different sectors of the programme.

Harmonisation: lastly, Parliament suggested that the priority should be to refrain from further harmonisation and major changes in the structure of the programme, and instead to safeguard and consolidate achievements and make incremental improvements where necessary. It called on the Commission in this respect to involve relevant stakeholders in the work on the next funding programming period, and in the introduction of possible improvements, in order to ensure the programme's further success and added value.