Training, education: Socrates programme, socio-economic background of ERASMUS students. Report 1997-1998

2000/2089(COS) - 13/07/2000

The committee adopted the report by Christopher HEATON-HARRIS (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission report on the socio-economic background of Erasmus students. While welcoming the Commission's socio-economic investigation, the committee regretted that it was published long after the formal adoption of the Socrates II programme and called for similar surveys to be carried out at more frequent intervals in future so that the findings could be taken into account. In particular, the committee called for an investigation into the low participation rate, pointing out that it was barely 50% overall during the period under review. It drew attention to the financial problems encountered by more than 57% of Erasmus students and urged the Commission to consider, within the budget already available for the scheme, other forms of indirect support (such as fare reductions, accommodation allowances, etc.) in addition to the present Erasmus grant. It stressed that, despite all the efforts to provide equal opportunities for all social groups, financially better-off groups continued to enjoy greater access to higher education and the Erasmus programme was indeed used mainly by students whose parents had a high level of qualifications. The committee also noted the major disparities highlighted by the survey regarding the respective participation rates of countries of origin and host countries and between various cultural backgrounds. It suggested a number of measures, such as strengthening European and national helplines to assist students with problems and creating a Web page for Erasmus students. In conclusion, it urged the Commission, when submitting its detailed proposals in autumn 2000, to help make the Erasmus programme more accessible to all social groups, provide for regular monitoring and assessment and find alternative methods of funding.