



21.9.2016

DRAFT REPORT

on the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 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 (2015/2327(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Milan Zver

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EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

Procedure and sources

In September 2015, the rapporteur was entrusted with the task of preparing a report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of 11 December 2013 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/EC¹. Since then, the rapporteur has collected a high number of information extracted from various resources.

In particular, he received valuable input from the study *Erasmus+: decentralised implementation - first experiences*, commissioned by the Policy Department B of the European Parliament and produced by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)². This in-depth analysis is based on research carried out between April and June 2016. It comprises a questionnaire-based online survey addressing all Erasmus+ national agencies (NAs) and interviews with representatives of 10 of the NAs aimed to identify first experiences in the decentralised actions of Erasmus+.

In addition, a European Implementation Assessment was carried out by the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), providing an in-house analysis on key elements of the programme implementation including the sport sector³. Two research papers were annexed to the assessment. The first research paper presents findings on the implementation of key action 1 (KA 1) - Learning mobility of individuals of education, training and youth. The second one addresses key action 2 (KA 2) - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices in the field of education, training and youth.

In order to gather additional information on the implementation of the programme, the rapporteur has also been in regular contact with a great number of stakeholders from all programme sectors. He had meetings with representatives of the Commission's Directorate General on Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

On 23 September 2016 the rapporteur will be attending a stakeholder's dialogue in Ljubljana organised by the European Parliament's Information Office in Slovenia. At this meeting the rapporteur will discuss with Commissioner Navracsics and stakeholders from national, regional and local level the state of play in the implementation process and possible further improvements of the programme.

Finally, when preparing this report the rapporteur also looked into key Commission documents, most notably the annual work programmes for the implementation of Erasmus+

¹ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.

² [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/585877/IPOL_STU\(2016\)585877_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/585877/IPOL_STU(2016)585877_EN.pdf).

³ The Erasmus+ Programme (Regulation EU No. 1288/2013): European Implementation Assessment, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/581414/EPRS_STU\(2016\)581414_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/581414/EPRS_STU(2016)581414_EN.pdf).

for the years 2014¹, 2015² and 2016³, and the first evaluation by the Commission in its Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report 2014⁴.

Despite all efforts with regard to the collection of information, the rapporteur is well aware of the fact that after less than three years of programme implementation a fully-fledged quantitative and qualitative assessment of Erasmus+ cannot be delivered. More information to be gathered in the remaining programme period is needed in order to evaluate the final impact of Erasmus+.

Therefore, with this implementation report the rapporteur intends to give an overview of the programme implementation over the first two and half years of its existence. It illustrates the opportunities and the main challenges and gives suggestions for improvement for the remaining four and half years. The conclusions and recommendations should feed into the programme's mid-term evaluation report to be submitted by the European Commission at the end of 2017. The report also gives some ideas which could be relevant for the negotiations for the next programme period.

Origin and structure of the programme

Erasmus+, launched in 2014, is based on a long historical development of EU programmes in education and training and youth. After launching several different programmes in the 80s, the streamlining of the programmes in education and training started with the creation of Socrates (education) and Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training) in the 90s. The Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) assembled the existing support programmes of the Socrates scheme and the Leonardo da Vinci programme under one roof. The creation of Erasmus+ brought about the biggest change with the integration of all programmes for education and training and youth under one umbrella (so-called integrated approach). The sport sector is for the first time added into the programme as new element of support.

Under the new integrated approach Erasmus+ is organised under three key actions (KAs): (1) Learning mobility for individuals, (2) Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices and (3) Support for policy reform. The two chapters education and training, and youth both set out clear specific objectives and relevant activities of the key actions. The sport sector is dealt with in a third chapter and not organised under key actions.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Many of the EU citizens value Erasmus+ as the major tool to support activities in the fields of education and training, youth and sport and consider it as a success story of European

¹ 2014 annual work programme for the implementation of the 'Erasmus+' Programme - International dimension of Higher Education, C(2014) 5455 of 5 August 2014,

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/awp/docs/c-2014-5455_en.pdf.

² 2015 annual work programme for the implementation of the 'Erasmus+' Programme: the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, C(2014)6856 of 30 August 2014,

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/awp/docs/c_2014_6856_en.pdf.

³ 2016 annual work programme for the implementation of the 'Erasmus+' Programme - International dimension of Higher Education, C(2015) 6151 of 14 September 2015,

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/awp/docs/c-2015-6151.pdf.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/statistics/erasmus-plus-annual-report_en.pdf.

integration. The overall conclusion is that the programme offers a variety of new opportunities for potential participants. The objectives of the programme are considered to be very much related to today's policies in the relevant fields.

With regard to the visibility of the programme the conclusion is two-fold. On the one hand the integration of the different programmes within one single programme has increased the visibility of the EU's support which also resulted in greater public and political attention. On the other hand several stakeholders criticise that due to the overall programme's complexity the different sectors now lack visibility.

The objective of simplification has been reached to a great extent with the introduction of several new measures such as the provision of digital solutions for the application process and the project management. Many stakeholders also appreciate the introduction of the unit cost system which brings about simplification in the financial management of the programme.

Still, without doubt the first two and a half years of implementation have been difficult and challenging. In the meantime, the Commission has improved implementation measures and is back on track. But still a lot has to be done to make the programme a success story in reality. For instance, the rapporteur has noticed that the level of satisfaction differs in the different programme sectors and within the different key actions.

The rapporteur considers it important to highlight in particular the following central conclusions and recommendations:

Cross-sectoral cooperation

The streamlined architecture of the programme was introduced to “create synergies and foster cross-sectoral cooperation across the various education, training and youth sectors”¹. According to 2/3 of the national agencies the increased potential for cross-sectoral cooperation is one of the biggest positive elements of Erasmus+. However, the cross-sectoral cooperation does not happen in reality. The rapporteur therefore asks the Commission to fully exploit the potential to foster and encourage cross-sectoral cooperation. Furthermore, the meaning of the term “cross-sectoral cooperation” does not seem to be clear. For instance, it is used for the cooperation between applicants and beneficiaries from various sectors, for the collaboration between the sectors managed by one national agency or even for the collaboration between national agencies with different portfolios. That is why the rapporteur suggests a clear definition of cross-sectoral projects for the next programme period.

Budget

Compared to the previous programme generation, the total budget of the programme has been significantly increased. The allocation of a budget increase of 40% for the programme shows the high political and economic value of Erasmus+. Nevertheless, the increase will only take effect from 2017 onwards. As a consequence of the limited budget increase for the years 2014 – 2016 parts of the programme only have a very low success rate. Even worse, a high number of good quality projects had to be rejected and expectations of many applicants have not been fulfilled. However, the rapporteur believes that the annual budget increase in the

¹ Recital 10 of Regulation 1288/2013.

remaining four years of the programme will result in continuously higher success rates and greater satisfaction among the applicants. He welcomes the intention of the Commission to allocate additional 200 Mio. Euro to the programme for the remaining programme period as announced in the Commission communication on the midterm review/revision of the MFF 2014–2020¹.

Looking ahead, for a continued success of the programme it is inevitable to further increase the budget for the next programme period. Last but not least the current commitment rate of nearly 100% for all actions throughout the programme demonstrates an imbalance between supply and demand which must be tackled by a further budget increase in order to continue the programme's success story.

Brand names

The long-standing brand names Comenius, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Youth in Action have always been important for the promotion of the different sectors. The Parliament has always been supporting their use in order to allow the stakeholders and beneficiaries clear guidance in the programme. The brand names ensure better recognition and avoid confusion, especially for beneficiaries who participated in the predecessor programme. In order to maintain and strengthen the identity of the specific sectors, they need to be used more actively by all stakeholders.

Simplification and user-friendliness

The several measures introduced in order to simplify the implementation of the programme have not yet shown the envisaged practical consequences for the stakeholders. While simplification is a main feature of the programme, the Programme Guide is described by many stakeholders as too complex, too lengthy and not sector specific. Its lack of clarity and uneven level of detail do not make it user-friendly. While the increased digitalisation of the application procedure and management is very welcomed, the use of the new IT tools brought along several problems. According to the national agencies they were too unstable, too time-consuming and not user-friendly for both, the NAs and the beneficiaries. The rapporteur welcomes the IT action plan presented by the Commission which aims at overcoming these day-to-day difficulties. In his report, he calls for further improvement of the relevant IT tools and urges the Commission to focus on their improvement instead of developing new tools. According to the stakeholders, the introduction of the unit cost system ease the administrative burden of the financial project management. However, the calculation system seems to be unjust, especially for beneficiaries from remote areas. The Commission already reacted with adjustments of the system. But the level of support is seen to be unrealistic as it allegedly does not meet the real costs encountered. The rapporteur considers a further increase of the unit cost level necessary in order to provide sufficient financial support for the project participants.

Small-sized organisations

Many stakeholders report concerns that Erasmus+ turns into a programme for large

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council “Mid-term review/revision of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020 – An EU budget focused on results”, COM(2016)0603 of 14.9.2016.

institutions and large development projects. Small-sized organisations mainly want to conduct small cooperation projects. But administrative burden make that very difficult. The small-sized organisations do not have the necessary financial and organisational capacities to successfully compete with large organisations. The Commission reacted to that criticism by introducing changes in the annual work programme 2016. Namely, in key action 2 two types of Strategic Partnerships were put forward: Strategic Partnerships aiming at implementing innovative practices in the field of education, training and youth, and Strategic Partnerships with a view to establishing exchanges of practices. In the sport sector, the concept of Small Collaborative Partnerships has been developed. The rapporteur is confident that these changes are a first step to increase the chances for small-sized organisations for cooperation projects. But he calls on the Commission for further improvements to be made in order to integrate more small-sized organisations into programme activities.

Further harmonisation and further changes

Last but not least, the rapporteur would like to underline his opinion to refrain from further harmonisation in the next programme period. The programme's achievements have to be safeguarded and consolidated. Further improvements have to be made where necessary while keeping the introduced structure of the programme. In this respect, the rapporteur calls on the Commission to keep the separate chapters for education and training, for youth and for sports with their separate budgets. Their specific characters have to be taken into account when setting their objectives and specific activities.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 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 (2015/2327(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular Article 14 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 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/EC¹,
- having regard to Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning²,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)³,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2010 on promoting youth access to the labour market, strengthening trainee, internship and apprenticeship status⁴,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on education for sustainable development,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 18 January 2011 entitled ‘Developing the European Dimension in Sport’ (COM(2011)0012),
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2011 on ‘Youth on the move: a framework for improving Europe’s education and training systems⁵,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2011 entitled ‘Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems’ (COM(2011)0567),
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 28 November 2011 on a ‘Renewed European

¹ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.

² OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

³ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 351 E, 2.12.2011, p. 29.

⁵ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 77.

- agenda on adult learning' (2011/C 372/01)¹,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 28 and 29 November 2011 on a benchmark for learning mobility²,
 - having regard to the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning³,
 - having regard to the 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), 'Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe'⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2013 on 'Rethinking Education'⁵,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 20 May 2014 on effective teacher education,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 20 May 2014 on quality assurance supporting education and training,
 - having regard to the Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education ('Paris Declaration'), adopted at the informal meeting of European Union Education Ministers on 17 March 2015 in Paris,
 - having regard to its resolution of 8 September 2015 on promoting youth entrepreneurship through education and training⁶,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 15 September 2015 entitled 'Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)' (COM(2015)0429),
 - having regard to the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), 'New priorities for European cooperation in education and training' (COM(2015)0408),
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence⁷,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and

¹ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 1.

² OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 31.

³ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 70, 8.3.2012, p. 9.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0433.

⁶ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0292.

⁷ OJ C 172, 27.5.2015, p. 17.

- promoting success in school¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 April 2016 on Learning EU at school²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 April 2016 on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in vocational education and training³,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 30 May 2016 on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 30 May 2016 on the role of the youth sector in an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to preventing and combating violent radicalisation of young people,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 10 June 2016 entitled ‘A new skills agenda for Europe’ (COM(2016)0381),
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 June 2016 on follow-up of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)⁴,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, Annex XVII to the Rules,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinions of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0000/2016),
- A. whereas Erasmus+ is one of the most successful Union programmes and the major tool to support activities in the fields of education, training, youth and sport;
- B. whereas the programme’s high political and economic relevance is reflected in the budget increase of 40% for the programme period, and the commitment rate of the foreseen budget which has reached nearly 100% with a high number of applications;
- C. whereas not all relevant data for a full quantitative and qualitative analysis of the implementation are yet available, whereas it is therefore too early to conduct a qualitative assessment of the programme’s impact;

Main conclusions

1. Notes that a large majority of national agencies expect the Erasmus+ programme’s objectives in the fields of education, training and youth to be reached;
2. Emphasises that the overall programme is more visible than its predecessor but that the different sectoral programmes lack visibility; recalls in this context that the specific features and characteristics of the different sectors have to be taken into account during

¹ OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 36.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0106.

³ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0107.

⁴ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0291.

the implementation of the programme;

3. Recognises that, according to reports from stakeholders at all levels, the first two and half years of programme implementation were difficult and challenging but improvements have been made in the meantime;
4. Points out that the goal of simpler, more user-friendly and more flexible implementation has not yet been reached; underlines in this context the continuing lack of clarity and uneven level of detail in the programme guide;
5. Recalls that despite the programme's significant overall budget increase, the budgetary profile in the MFF indicates a limited increase for the first half of the programme period, which has led to the rejection of many high quality projects and hence a low success rate;
6. Believes that the 12.7% increase in the total budget in 2017 compared to 2016 and further annual increases in the remaining programme years will result in higher success rates and greater satisfaction among applicants; welcomes the Commission's intention to allocate an additional EUR 200 million for the remaining programme period;
7. Stresses that virtual means are one way to support the dissemination and exploitation of results, but that personal contacts and face-to-face activities play a very important role in the success of a project and of the overall programme;
8. Notes that the Student Loan Guarantee Facility was only launched in February 2015 after signature of the delegation agreement with the European Investment Fund (EIF) in December 2014, and that to date there are only three banks in France and Spain participating in this innovative tool;
9. Regrets that organisations representing amateur sportspeople at local level are highly underrepresented as project participants in the implementation of grassroots sports projects; welcomes the introduction of Small Collaborative Partnerships with reduced administrative requirements as an important step in enabling smaller grassroots sports organisations to take part in the programme;

Recommendations

10. Asks the Commission to fully exploit the potential to foster and encourage 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;
11. Considers the long-standing brand names (Comenius, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Youth in Action) as important tools in promoting the variety of the programme; calls on all stakeholders to continue to use them in order to maintain and strengthen the identity of the sectoral programmes, to ensure better recognition and to overcome any confusion among beneficiaries;
12. Encourages the Commission to continue its efforts towards an open, consultative and transparent way of working and to further improve its cooperation with partners at all

levels of implementation;

13. Calls on the Commission to ensure the regular exchange of information and good cooperation between the implementation bodies at European level and national agencies on both decentralised and centralised programme actions;
14. Suggests that the organisational structure of the relevant Commission services be aligned with the structure of the programme;
15. Calls for further improvement of the relevant IT tools and for the focus to be put on streamlining and improving connections between the different tools rather than developing new ones;
16. Calls on the Commission to develop further the eTwinning, School Education Gateway, Open Education Europe, EPALE, European Youth Portal and VALOR IT platforms in order to make them more attractive and user-friendly; asks the Commission to include an evaluation of these platforms in the Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation;
17. Welcomes the introduction of two types of strategic partnerships as a first and important positive step towards increasing the chances for small-sized organisations to participate in the programme; calls on the Commission to make further improvements in order to include more small-sized organisations in programme activities;
18. Welcomes the introduction of the unit cost system into the programme in order to minimise the administrative burden; welcomes also the adjustments made in 2016 and planned for 2017 by the Commission; considers the further increase in unit cost rates to be necessary to provide sufficient financial support for project participants;
19. Calls for volunteering to be eligible as a source of own contributions to the project budget, bearing in mind that Erasmus+ enables the recognition of volunteer time as co-financing in the form of contributions in kind;
20. Asks the Commission to harmonise the indicated pre-financing rates as much as possible throughout the programme in order to give all beneficiaries the same advantages and to facilitate project implementation, especially for small-sized organisations;
21. Calls on the Commission to recognise the special nature of projects and mobilities involving people with special needs and people from disadvantaged backgrounds; encourages stronger promotion of the possibilities for people with special needs and for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to engage in the programme and asks that their access thereto be facilitated;

Next programme period

22. Suggests 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;
23. Suggests that a clear definition of cross-sectoral projects be developed in order to avoid

confusion resulting from the mislabelling of projects;

24. Calls not only for the current budget level to be secured for the next programme generation under the new MFF, but considers a further budget increase to be an important step for the continued success of the programme;
25. Calls on the Commission to keep the separate chapters and separate budgets for education and training, for youth and for sport, bearing in mind their specific characters;
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, as well as to the parliaments and governments of the Member States.