



Minutes – Public Hearing at the European Parliament
Defining a future EU education and youth programme
27 March 2012, Brussels, Belgium

Members of the Coalition led by EUCIS-LLL together with 30 stakeholders attended the European Parliament's public hearing on the new funding programme "Erasmus for all" on 27 March 2012. Chaired by the MEP Doris Pack (EPP), the hearing was aimed at collecting the inputs from several experts and launching a debate to contribute to the report she will write, as the rapporteur of the CULT Committee on the programme. A Commission representative was also present to take the remarks into account and answer some of the concerns.

Opening remarks by the chair

Doris Pack: Training, education, youth employment, youth are today's topics. **We aim at achieving the impressive ET2020 objectives like reducing school drop outs but we need the resources to do so;** all member states agreed that cuts in E&T and youth would be the wrong approach. The Lifelong Learning Programmes and the Youth in Action programme have achieved a lot, as many people that contacted me proved it; they are **equally important to reach those targets and must be seen as such;** they all have their own target audience and we do need to focus on them.

Part I: Presentation by experts

"Schools in Europe need COMENIUS" by Dr Thomas Spielkamp (Acting and Deputy Director of Pädagogischer Austauschdienst (PAD))

Mr Spielkamp speaks on behalf of **the school sector that should not be left behind but strengthened.** Comenius is much younger than Erasmus with a much smaller budget but it is also a great success. This is part of the identity of many colleagues and schools. We need to think what we want to achieve with the new programme: to gather target groups that are very different with a horizontal approach means that small schools will be competing with much larger bodies like universities and they should not. **Specific programmes need to stay and Comenius has a real added value to teach the next generation with many good examples like Comenius Regio.** The idea of the next programme is good: cooperation between sectors. Yet I do not think it should be the main goal, that is more how learners move from one sector to another.

Besides, the colleagues involved in Comenius project do it in top of their teaching work and **the burden put on them should be minimized.** Schools do not aim at reaching the ET2020 targets; they aim at school twinning, peer learning and cooperation. They like simple approaches and bureaucracy hinders the access; and **simplification does not mean passing tasks from the Commission and member states to the beneficiaries.** **The application procedure should be simplified** with a menu that could involve teachers and students in a combined programme. The **mobility of teachers** is endangered because it seems less relevant but there should be activities, targeted actions for them too and **preparatory visits and seminars should not disappear:** they may be administratively complex but they are useful in terms of training.

The burden is also financial and we do not think schools are in a position to take full financial responsibility for large consortia; **the management should stay in the hands of national agencies and we need more human resources there.** One main change was moving **to lump sums that makes things easier for schools** and should be continued. Financial management should not be however the heart of the project. We also need to focus on the content of the projects. **For instance, we should also make bilateral projects possible and consider allowing schools to be involved for just one year.** As for the ET2020 targets, not every project can be clearly in line with specific EU benchmarks. **Most of the projects have an impact on the life of schools communities, students and teachers involved but you cannot always quantify them and you need to trust us on that.** **E-twinning** is also an important point to reflect on.

Conclusive remarks: we need to **strengthen the school sector that is the largest target group in terms of figures has been forgotten in Youth in action and Erasmus for all.** Comenius does represent success and is the

tool for that. So we need to see **an increase of budget** for schools because every citizen starts by being a pupil.

“Youth in Action 2.0: investing in youth participation & youth work to support young people’s autonomy” by Mr Peter Matjašič (President of the European Youth Forum)

Why is it relevant to talk about a continuous youth programme? We need it to tackle challenges like flexible employment, social inclusion and active citizenship. “Erasmus for all” made many good steps on learning mobility, higher education, volunteering but **remains unsatisfactory for inclusiveness, youth friendliness...** A renewed Youth in Action programme should support young people in the development of soft skills through non-formal education and the **YFJ stands firmly behind a separate youth programme.**

The EU needs to make youth policy a financial and political priority. **We welcome the MFF strong focus on mobility, informal and non-formal education and we support the budget increase.** In financial terms, as every euro should be now multipurpose, **Youth in Action makes sense because it is low cost and highly efficient.** After the public consultation on the future of the Youth in Action programme, 40% of respondents were in favour of continuing a separate one, like many member states and the Danish presidency. **The democratic voice of stakeholders has been dismissed by the Commission; that is why we call the Parliament to take action today.** The **article 165 TFUE for youth mobility** should be the basis of the new European youth programme that would be an instrument for the implementation of the EU policy agenda like the Youth on the move initiative. We want a programme focused on **non-formal education and youth work** to support young people autonomy via a wide range of organisations and address young people’s needs across Europe. The main challenges of E&T systems are to equip citizens with competences for a changing labour market and a knowledge society but **those challenges cannot be addressed by the formal education sector alone. It requires the development of a culture of solidarity,** care and understanding, an intercultural and intergenerational dialogue.

Soft skills acquired through youth activities are less tangible than others and learning outcomes are more difficult to quantify: intercultural team work, self-confidence, leadership, project management and coordination, problem-solving.... Non-formal education is complementary to formal education and can empower young people and make them learn by doing. **The YFJ believes in a holistic lifelong learning approach. We welcome the visibility of non-formal learning in “Erasmus for all” but non-formal education is absent.** Similarly, there is a **focus on individuals but not on youth providers;** the new programme should provide them more opportunities for an appropriate recognition of their competences for instance. Youth-led organisations are the main providers of non-formal education and **should be provided a supportive structure for capacity-building** in “Erasmus for all”. As for active citizenship, the last Eurobarometer shows poor understanding of the European citizenship by young people. **European NGOs are active in raising awareness, involving all actors; their role is crucial and their operating support should not be cut.** The Commission is ready to support them through project funding but **they do much more than projects. They contribute to follow EU policy-making and connect it to the grassroots level. They play a key role in the structured dialogue** and they cannot spend all their time on administrative constraints for projects; that would also have a negative effect on their staff.

Conclusive remarks: we want a separate programme but that does not mean we want to keep it as it is. We believe that it is **possible to find a balance between the Commission’s need for the right spending and the actors’ need to get more involved. The future programme should be implemented by actors that are properly supported.** The impact of Youth in Action is bigger than any other programme and the EU should be proud of that and ambitious.

“Higher Education in “Erasmus for all”: Between hopes and fears” by Dr Siegbert Wuttig (Director of Detuscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD))

Erasmus is celebrating its 25th anniversary with major successes and a significant and sustainable impact on individuals but also institutions and systems. It has become a model for regional mobility and academic cooperation across the world. The new proposal contains **excellent elements: increased budget, simplified management, loan instruments for mobility, university-business cooperation.** The programme is probably even better than the text says and we trust the benefits for higher education.

However radical changes should be brought: the Commission wants to give up on certain programmes which have proven their worth. **In an integrated approach, clarity will be lost for the users.** Besides, with so many budget cuts in member states, perhaps Erasmus is not “for all” anymore. **A significant budget should be incorporated in the text.** We would also like first to see modernisations in the **geographical coverage: it should be extended to all countries of the European Higher Education Area.** Besides, **neighbouring countries** should be more involved in capacity-building in the line of Erasmus Mundus and Asia has been left aside. Finally, it may be **a mistake to transfer the PhD level in the Marie Curie programme** because it became attractive via Erasmus and we do not want to lose this brand for the doctorate level. We are concerned about **Tempus Alpha and Edulink.**

Some recommendations: the new programme should strengthen European HEIs **in line with the Bologna process; access** to the programme should be improved, better grants should be provided and **clear budget lines for sectors should be draft to ensure stability and security for beneficiaries.**

“Learning Europe – the Nordic perspective” by PhD Pasi Sahlberg (Director General of Centre for International Mobility (CIMO))

CIMO implements all the European programmes in culture, E&T, youth. Mr Sahlberg also speaks as a university teacher and a policy maker. To him young people are vital for economic success and social cohesion so we have **to keep on investing in people in coming years** as the best long term investment. In 2020 more young people will look for a job and ageing people will be better educated. Mobility in general will have increased.

Like many other member states Finland has benefited from E&T and youth programmes and the draft proposal highlights the importance given to education and youth in the European growth strategy. But there are several shortfalls. First, **we would welcome a better focus on lifelong learning and some sectors are left behind like VET or adult learning** (while the ageing population is a reality). In that sense, the new programme should also **provide equal opportunities to all pupils regardless to the type of school they are in.** Similarly, the specific sector of youth is absent and **we support a separate youth programme.** Therefore the new programme should **ensure budget allocations for all target groups and sectors.** Besides, we would like to see **third country cooperation extended further than higher education and the youth sector.** The future of the EU depends on its external relations and Europe should not isolate form its surroundings.

As a national agency, we think that the **proposed simplified management is a positive development.** The implementation should be efficient but also rationalised. Decentralisation over the years led to a better impact and less administration burden. SIMO has been often graded for its good practices. We concentrated different elements of the programmes in the same agency, we raised mobility and provided expertise and we are involved in international cooperation of all kinds. We are even developing an innovative instrument that will evaluate how young people can develop their global mindedness. **Time and resources are therefore essential for our functioning.**

Conclusive remark: the programmes are one of the few instruments that address directly the citizens of Europe and they should be valued for that.

Comment from Doris Pack: I note that we did not invite anyone defending the Grundtvig programme. I will not forget it in my report.

Part II: Debate

Q: to the YFJ: how will you change the existing proposal? How to make it closer to your priorities? Do you think that the issue of education is represented enough? Do you think that the simplification of the programme is sufficient?

Q: Has Comenius really been a success? It did not create the added value we expected, meaning increasing the level of education in general.

Q: The new loan guarantee instrument has already been agreed in the Bologna programme but each member

state establishes its own. Are the students considering them attractive enough? Students do not want them because many end up unemployed and it is then risky to take a loan. Besides, if not all member states want to participate in this system, how is it possible to access it in another member state?

Q: to the YFJ: should the sports field be also autonomous? What is the position of the YFJ on loan guarantees?

Q: in Austria, the youth organisations are built in a specific structure and we do not want that to be modified with the new programme. Besides, on ET2020 targets, mobility is not the solution to all of them.

Q: What do you all think to improve an awareness of the European institutions and introduce in the curriculum of secondary schools a specific subject on their history, functioning and goals?

Q: what is the role of social media here?

Q: why are we integrating those programmes? We are dealing with very good brands that have passed the tests. I do understand the Commission's arguments, but we really need to focus on the relevance of this integrated approach.

Q: I share the concerns about the title of the programme. We have spent many years spreading the other brands and it is not relevant to bring them all under Erasmus. Youth should be separated and adult learning should be enhanced through mobility.

Q: much of what has been said today overlaps the Committee's discussion. For the YFJ: do you have any idea for us on how to link the youth programme and the youth strategy?

Dr Thomas Spielkamp: Comenius is already a success. You cannot always quantify results when dealing with children. What children do in schools later on is transferred in their professional life. There are thousands of applications we cannot even process. Do we need a new Europe school subject? I don't think so. Neither do I think that the budget should be released to national agencies, we risk losing control of expenditures.

Mr Peter Matjašič: we are not against simplification. **We want simpler procedures and rules.** On sports, youth is indeed very much linked. We are not against a separate programme for them but we feel it is essential for the youth programme before all. The Parliament should remind the Commission that it is accountable. **On social media, youth organisations have a role to play** and we will soon issue a position paper on their effects and how we can improve the participation in governance through it. More creativity is needed in that area. As for the **loans**, our national members deal with them and have informed me that they are **not technically thought through**. Responsibility should be on member states to clarify it.

Dr Siegbert Wuttig: horizontal lines are here to streamline but the sectors do exist. Nobody is opposed to the big umbrella structure but the question is how the institutions are going to organise it.

PhD Pasi Sahlberg: one of the main expectations is indeed what the big picture will look like. We would benefit from a programme that allows more cross-sectorial approaches. We should have instruments or tools that would enable us to combine youth, VET... and with the current proposal we cannot do that.

Part II: Comment from the Commission

Mr Jordi CURELL GOTOR, DG EAC (Directorate C: Lifelong learning: higher education and international affairs): We share many opinions. First, all current programmes are fantastic and we build the new proposal on a solid basis. Then we recognise the **crucial role of E&T and youth** for the well-being and growth of our societies. Thirdly, we agree that we all have high ambitions for this proposal. We are facing difficult times and we have to put up a convincing proposal for those who will decide for the budget. For that we need:

- **A stronger link between the programme and the policy developments** to make sure that it is aligned with ET2020, EU2020 and the youth field
- **An increased impact**
- **Simplification**, not for the institutions (and we know that we are an accountable body) but for users

However we cannot do the same even if the programmes were a success. The paradigm change is here and we have to deal with it. All the proposals are clearly explained in the legal basis and the communication. Decisions are not always easy. In order to enhance synergies with other programmes, we have **to exclude from “Erasmus for all” people on the labour market** (taken care of by the ESF). As for mobility, **we believe that it has an impact when it is youth, VET or HE mobility, not schools and adult learners mobility.**

To answer diverse concerns, we have not proposed not to refer to youth work, to participation in democratic life (art 5 of the proposal), to build a separate programme for sport, to end e-Twinning for schools. **E-Twinning is strategic, whatever the size.** Asia will be included in the programmes. PhDs will indeed not be in Erasmus Mundus but in Marie Curie.

We have kept the lifelong learning dimension in the proposal because we believe it is very important. What we propose is a holistic approach: we cannot differentiate formal, non-formal and informal learning because they are all lifelong learning; therefore we have an integrated approach. **This approach is the right one, it will enable many synergies. What we do not propose is putting sectors in competition.** Of course there will be consortia but everything will not be mixed up. That is why the Commission is committed to really identify **minimal allocations per sector.** We do not deny reality, we want to impact it.

As for the name, “Erasmus for all” is the right one: it is very well known, associated with young people and mobility. This is important for visibility. It does not mean that the focus is on Erasmus, higher education or employability, and that sectors are left behind. This is “Erasmus for all”, not “All for Erasmus”.

Concluding remarks by the Chair

Doris Pack: The things we asked for are not here. Today we have listened to experts and practically all of them think **we need a sectorial direction for the new proposal**, so that everybody knows what can be found there. The draft proposal makes promises that it cannot stand. You have to allow us to think about the proposal ourselves. **As for Comenius, it is a fantastic approach, especially Comenius Regio.** The objective is to make Europeans out of children. Comenius was never a teachers’ programme. What we would like is further training for teachers to be included. **As for the youth programme, it has to have a name, a budget with no cuts.**

Key messages

- Despite the lifelong learning holistic approach the Commission promotes in the draft proposal, many sectors feel left behind (VET, adult education), especially the youth sector that firmly stands behind a separate programme. An umbrella structure may not be rejected but clear budget lines and target groups should be identified.
- Clear support in terms of financial and human resources should be provided to all actors involved in the implementation process of the new programme: national agencies, European networks, grassroots organisations....
- Stakeholders do identify good elements in the proposal: an increased budget, a simplified management, loans (even though they have to be re-thought)...
- The Parliament, like the Danish Presidency, supports many critics the stakeholders have made on the draft proposal.