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Subject: Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme and future orientations for post-2020
- *Policy debate*
(*Public debate in accordance with Article 8(2) of the Council's Rules of Procedure*)
[proposed by the Presidency]

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached discussion paper, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 15 February 2018.

**Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme and future orientations
for post-2020****Presidency discussion paper**

At the European Council meeting of 14 December 2017, European Heads of State called on Member States, the Council and the Commission "to step up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ programme".

State of play and mid-term evaluation

Currently, Erasmus+ is one of the most renowned, celebrated and successful EU programmes. In the last 30 years it has had a positive impact on over 9 million Europeans by developing their professional and personal capacities and strengthening European identity and values. The programme is symbolic for Europe and for our common values.

With more than 2,000 transnational strategic partnerships per year, the Erasmus+ programme goes beyond Europe-wide learning mobility. These partnerships involve education, training and youth organisations, NGOs, businesses and chambers of commerce, policy innovation and experimentation projects, evidence gathering, peer learning, benchmarking and capacity-building projects in less developed parts of the world. Erasmus+ also supports capacity-building in partner countries and contributes significantly to the EU's external policies.

In line with the Erasmus+ Regulation, the Commission is shortly expected to adopt a Communication responding to the mid-term evaluation report on the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessors. Indications are that the mid-term evaluation report will show that the programme is well on track to meet its target of supporting 4 million people over the 2014-2020 period in Europe and beyond.

Compared to its predecessors, Erasmus+ also appears to be more coherent - because of its wide lifelong learning scope, which covers all education and training sectors, combining formal, informal and non-formal learning actions and its complementarity with the European Social Fund and Horizon 2020 - and more efficient, with further simplification and efficiency gains expected by 2020.

The evaluation confirms that the Erasmus+ budget is consistently absorbed in full, and that the available funds are insufficient to cover the strong demand.

Future orientations for post-2020

During the consultations held in the context of the mid-term evaluation, Member States, learning institutions and participants underlined that the future Erasmus+ programme should offer continuity in its basic architecture and structures. Stakeholders also underlined that the future programme should remain integrated and underpinned by the lifelong learning concept, both in the context of formal and non-formal learning such as youth work and sport.

Looking to the future, the mid-term evaluation identified the following areas for improvement that could be addressed when shaping the Erasmus+ programme post-2020:

Strengthening the impact

Evidence shows that the use of Erasmus+ project results could be strengthened, also by strengthened cross-sectoral cooperation. Even though very few overlaps were found with other complementary EU schemes, more could be done to scale-up the results of Erasmus+ projects that have the potential to trigger structural reforms at national level, for instance with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds and other EU or national funds.

Erasmus+ has a positive effect on the acquisition of skills and competences, increasing employability and shortening the transition from education to employment. The programme's potential to foster smart growth and contribute to the competitiveness of our economies can be further explored.

Inclusiveness and openness

More could be done in the future to make the post-2020 Erasmus+ programme even more inclusive, accessible and open. Access to the programme for participants could be broadened and made more democratic, by including new regions, rural or deprived areas, and disadvantaged learners.

Participation in the programme by organisations with smaller capacity and little or no experience in the application process could also be fostered.

More generally, against the background of recent challenges testing the resilience of the European Union, there is a need to strengthen the young generations' understanding of European integration and to increase awareness from an early age of common European values, including through exchanges with other countries, within and beyond the EU. The programme has the potential to further reinforce European citizenship and strengthen trust in the European project.

Innovation and internationalisation

More efforts could be made to strengthen the role of Erasmus+ as an instrument for stimulating innovation in the fields of education, training and youth. Although local innovation is achieved by the programme, this innovation does not always have a systemic impact. The design and dissemination of actions that promote innovation could be improved. To maximise the effect of the programme it is key to include all levels of education, as well as lifelong learning - including up-skilling, re-skilling and returning to education during adulthood.

As regards the international dimension, the general finding is that the projects funded by previous programmes have contributed to policy and institutional reforms and internationalisation in partner countries, through improved quality assurance, standardisation of higher education and the rapid spread of EU-supported Bologna principles. The programme could be more open to the rest of the world, increasing the participation of partner countries, including in particular neighbouring countries also in projects in the field of VET.

Digitalisation and modernisation

Erasmus+ could play a major role in the ambitious plan for digital skills and competences development and digital education in Europe by using new technologies to boost virtual mobility and ensure that Europeans can fully reap the benefits of digital citizenship, and to support the digitalisation of our economies and industries.

The programme has to adequately reflect the digital reality we live in and offer a smart, simple and innovative application process in order to increase learner and teacher mobility for the benefit of all European citizens.

Questions:

- 1. What measures can be taken to encourage increased participation - post-2020, but also during the remainder of the current programme - in particular by peripheral regions and those lagging behind socio-economically, as well as by participants from all socio-economic backgrounds and organisations with smaller capacity?*
- 2. How could the programme contribute more effectively to strengthening Europe's innovation capacity and to attracting and reintegrating our brightest minds in the future?*
- 3. How could synergies be reinforced and made more systemic and operational between Erasmus+ and other instruments in order to better address inequalities, including as regards the digital divide, geographic isolation and levels of economic growth?*