

## Claiming a stronger Erasmus for the empowerment of the future generation of Europeans

*Reaction of the Erasmus Student Network and the European Students' Union to the proposed Erasmus+ budget in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*

On 14 February 2020, the President of the European Council Charles Michel unveiled his draft European Council conclusions for the multiannual budget of the EU for 2021-2027. The document addresses, for the first time, the financial outlook envisioned by the Council for the next multiannual financial framework, including the budget for the successor Erasmus+ Programme. In this reaction, ESN and ESU present their view on the initial budgetary proposal put forward by the European Council with regards to the proposed funding for Erasmus+, with a particular focus on the higher education and youth sectors.

ESN and ESU have been contributing to the discussions on the new Erasmus+ Programme in multiple ways. In 2018, ESN's #ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto was published, consisting of 13 base recommendations for the revised Erasmus+ Programme, which were used as a guide for advocacy on the topic<sup>1</sup>. ESN and ESU took part in the Erasmusx10 campaign<sup>2</sup>, coordinated by the European Youth Forum and the Lifelong Learning Platform and supported by 70 civil society organisations, which called upon the European decision-makers to increase the Erasmus Programme funding tenfold. In 2019, in response to the original proposal by the European Commission, ESN published a reaction paper, where the necessity for more investment in the new Erasmus+ Programme was emphasized<sup>3</sup>. This position has been reiterated in a joint position paper of ESN and ESU<sup>4</sup>.

In its conclusions from the Gothenburg Summit in December 2017, the European Council has called upon Member States and other European Institutions to “**make work towards stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ Programme**”<sup>5</sup>. The original European Commission proposal

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<sup>1</sup> [https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/english\\_eum.pdf](https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/english_eum.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://erasmusx10.eu/>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/reaction\\_of\\_the\\_erasmus\\_student\\_network\\_to\\_the\\_new\\_erasmus\\_programme.pdf](https://esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/reaction_of_the_erasmus_student_network_to_the_new_erasmus_programme.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/102019\\_ESU\\_ESN\\_JointPositionPaper\\_Erasmus.pdf](https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/102019_ESU_ESN_JointPositionPaper_Erasmus.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>

included a two-fold increase in funding compared with the current Programme, while the European Parliament has committed to a tri-fold increase – a position which was supported by the new Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen.

The proposal of the President of the Council, in ESN's and ESU's view, **does not deliver on those commitments** by not meeting neither the EP proposal, nor the initial proposal of the Commission. The current proposed budget of 21.2 billion EUR is 30% less than the originally Commission proposal of two-fold increase and more than 50% cut from Parliament's. The proposed increase makes it impossible to raise and widen participation without compromising on the quality of mobility experiences and their outreach, thus going against the promise of “a *more inclusive and accessible Erasmus*”.

The Initial proposal of the European Commission had proposed reaching 12 million people, three times the amount of the current programme, with only a twofold increase of the budget. The future Erasmus programme is more ambitious, with more student mobility to non-EU destinations and support the European University Initiatives to reach 50% mobility goals. The proposal currently negotiated will further undercut those plans, by proposing to do it with even less budgetary support. This idea goes directly against the spirit of the programme and the ambitions of the education institutions and civil society in the time when the need for broad and more inclusive Erasmus+ for a cohesive Europe is greater than ever. Education remains a key driver of social mobility in the world, and thus, not allocating enough budget for key European education programme will only exacerbate the still prevalent issues of youth unemployment (currently at 15 %<sup>6</sup>) and risks of poverty and societal exclusion of youth (estimated at 26.3 %, or 20.6 million young people, in 2018<sup>7</sup>).

The lack of funding in the current proposal will undercut the ambitious policy undertakings stated in previous years, undermining the viability of the European Education Area and of its key initiatives - representatives of European Parliament have already warned that the current amount of funding would make it impossible to finance crucial European education and youth policies such as European Universities, VET Centres of Excellence and DiscoverEU<sup>8</sup>. The international side of the proposed Erasmus+ Programme may also be cut – making proposed expansion of Erasmus+ in the world under threat.

The benefits of Erasmus+ for the young people are widespread and well-documented. Students with Erasmus experience are more mobile, are more eager to contribute to society through volunteering and civic engagement and are more engaged in the electoral processes, including European elections, according to the results of the ESNsurvey 2019<sup>9</sup>. According to

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tesem140/default/table?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young\\_people\\_-\\_social\\_inclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young_people_-_social_inclusion)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200218IPR72818/proposed-erasmus-mff-budget-hopelessly-short-of-citizens-expectations>

<sup>9</sup> <https://esn.org/ESNsurvey>

Eurobarometer, 90% of young people in Europe consider an experience abroad "very important"<sup>10</sup> and 56% of young people said improving education should be one of the EU priorities<sup>11</sup>. However, significant barriers to mobility remain - the Erasmus Impact Studies, the ESNsurvey 2019 and ESU's triannual Bologna with Students Eyes Study consistently shows the same results - approximately 70% of respondents named financial conditions as the main reason not to go abroad - and one of the most efficient ways to increase the number of quality mobilities is, among others, to increase funding and thus the number of well-funded mobility experiences. Studies have also shown that participation in Erasmus-funded activities is directly linked to skills development and higher employability after graduation - the risk of unemployment after graduation was half as high for Erasmus alumni<sup>12</sup>.

While the European Commission and the European Parliament both have taken visible positions to ensure the continuing success and broadening of the Erasmus+ Programme, now it is time for the European Council to follow suit. The current version of the MFF proposal has already been rejected by the European Parliament<sup>13</sup>, citing among the reasons deep cuts to the key areas and programmes, including Erasmus, the funding for which, according to the CULT Committee chair, "*fails hopelessly below expectations*". **The Erasmus Student Network and the European Students' Union call upon the European Council and Member States not to threaten the progress of Erasmus, by committing to the European Parliament's proposal to increase the funding for the next Erasmus Programme by three times.** In that, ESN and ESU support the position of European Youth Forum and other civil society organisations on this issue<sup>14</sup>. This position is equally applicable for all future budgetary proposals from the Council.

European leaders have highlighted their commitment to the European project and the contribution of the Erasmus+ programme to the construction of a stronger Union. After 33 years changing lives and opening minds, Erasmus has proved to be one of the most effective tools to bring Europeans together. In order to increase the impact and outreach of the programme, the commitments of Member States should match the expectations put in the programme.

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**Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** is the biggest student association in Europe. Present at over 1000 Higher Education Institutions, it unites over 530 local associations in 42 countries. More

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<sup>10</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 466,

<https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/83257>

<sup>11</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 478,

<https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/86163>

<sup>12</sup> Erasmus Impact Study 2014, p. 115. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/13031399-9fd4-11e5-8781-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-116905027>

<sup>13</sup> <https://europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/newsroom/sassoli-parliament-united-on-the-mff---we-will-not-just-accept-any-agreement>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youthforum.org/skip-cappuccino-invest-youth>



than 15 000 volunteers take care of over 350 000 international students under the motto “Students helping students”. ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing the student exchange from different levels, and providing an intercultural experience.

**European Students’ Union (ESU)** is the umbrella organisation of 46 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 countries. It represents the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of more than 20 million students towards all relevant decision making bodies such as the European Union, the Bologna Process, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.