



2016/2151(DEC)

25.1.2017

OPINION

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015, Section III - Commission and executive agencies
(2016/2151(DEC))

Rapporteur: Silvia Costa

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Underlines the value and popularity of the Erasmus+ programme; regrets the suspension of payments throughout 2015 under the “Youth” strand in Greece and particularly its impact on young people; welcomes the lifting of the suspension in April 2016;
2. Recalls the concerns expressed by Youth NGOs over the decentralisation of funding disbursements for Erasmus+; welcomes the commitment of the Commission to find a solution to this issue; stresses that involving stakeholders and beneficiaries in the meetings of the Programme Committee may pave the way for a sustainable and shared solution;
3. Reiterates that the incorporation of all mobility programmes for young people in the EU into ERASMUS+ is primarily intended to increase their efficacy, and therefore urges the Commission to stick to the agreed aims and programme budget lines in order to avoid the programme losing its focus;
4. Welcomes the responsiveness of both Erasmus+ and Creative Europe in reacting to the emerging challenges of refugee/migrant integration and anti-radicalisation in 2015;
5. Notes that loans under the Student Loan Guarantee Facility (Erasmus+ Master Loan) were made available for the first time in 2015, with two banks in Spain and France launching the scheme; insists that, to become a viable loan facility, it will be vital to ensure broad geographic coverage and for the Commission to monitor closely the lending conditions;
6. Welcomes the increased funding for ERASMUS+ in 2017, emphasises the need to increase the budget for the subsequent programme years by at least the same amount, and calls for this money to be spent exclusively on programme lines that exist already;
7. Recalls that 2015 was the first year in which the Creative Europe programme was managed across two Commission Directorates-General, DG EAC and DG CNECT; insists on the need for a coordinated approach so that internal organisational challenges do not impair the functioning of the programme or public perception of it;
8. Notes that the increase in funding applications in 2015 under the Europe for Citizens programme and the Creative Europe programme, in particular its Culture sub-programme, is in line with the anticipated pattern of applications across the lifecycle of the programmes; stresses, however, that there is still too low a project success rate in the case of Creative Europe; states also that the situation of Europe for Citizens is not improving, as the initial cuts are hampering the whole run of the programme, at a time when this type of project is badly needed in terms of the EU’s communication with its citizens; insists therefore, as this situation is causing frustration and disappointment among applicants, that the increase in applications accepted must be met with more funding for both programmes;

9. Recalls that EACEA plays an important role in delivering the three programmes; welcomes the greater use of online project applications by the Agency; expresses concern, however, that users continue to perceive systems as too complex and urges EACEA to take account of national desks' experience to improve the systems and the communication with potential beneficiaries, as well as with the unsuccessful candidates;
10. Takes due note of the reservations lodged by EACEA with regard to payments under the 2007-2013 Lifelong Learning, Culture and Youth programmes; shares the Agency's view that the move from the reimbursement of eligible costs towards lump-sum and flat-rate payments under the 2014-2020 programmes should reduce error rates, while ensuring that financial controls are proportionate and do not discourage applications;
11. Takes due note of the European Court of Auditors Special Report 16/2016 entitled "EU education objectives: programmes aligned but shortcomings in performance measurement" and its recommendations; concurs with the Court that education objectives should be properly embedded in Operational Programmes (OPs) and welcomes the improved design of OPs identified by the Court for the 2014-2020 programme period; notes the Court's insistence that there always be a clear link between education measures and employability; reiterates that, while a central aspect of education should be to prepare students for the labour market, the delivery of high-quality education goes far beyond simply enhancing employability and calls on the Court and the Commission to ensure a broader focus is maintained;
12. Expresses concern at the ongoing pressure on capacity at the four European schools in Brussels, three of which were officially overcrowded in both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016; welcomes the Belgian government's decision to make a fifth European school available in Brussels as of the 2019-2020 school year; endorses the Board of Governors' decision to make the Berkendael site available as a temporary extension of the Brussels I school;
13. Expresses growing concern that the European Schools are not acting on problems repeatedly identified by the European Court of Auditors and highlighted by the European Parliament in its discharge reports; notes with alarm that, in its 'Report on the annual accounts of the European schools for the financial year 2015', the Court reports that the Schools did not prepare their annual accounts within the legal deadline and declares that it is "unable to confirm that the financial management was sound"; underlines the repeated recommendation of the European Court of Auditors to the Central Office of European Schools to provide more guidelines on planning and designing procurement procedures; stresses that the Central Office and European Schools should follow the Financial Regulation and its Implementing Rules, simplify the selection and award criteria and improve documentation;
14. Takes note of efforts by EU institutions to reduce the payments backlog; highlights that a recurring payments backlog can be avoided by respecting payments appropriations, providing adequate resources in the revision of the MFF, and establishing a system of own-resources for the EU.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	24.1.2017
Result of final vote	+: 21 -: 1 0: 4