



**2017/2136(DEC)**

26.1.2018

# **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 2016, Section III - Commission and executive agencies  
(2017/2136(DEC))

Rapporteur: Bogdan Andrzej Zdrojewski

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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. Welcomes the fact that Erasmus+ enabled 500,000 people to study, train or volunteer abroad in 2016 and is on track to achieve its target of 4 million participants by 2020; stresses that Erasmus+ students tend to develop a large set of transferable skills, competences and knowledge and enjoy better career prospects than non-mobile students and that the programme delivers as a strategic investment in Europe's young people; points out, however, the need to ensure wider accessibility of the programme in particular for young people with fewer opportunities;
2. Welcomes the fact that the Erasmus+ funding application procedure has largely been transferred online; believes, however, that the procedure could be simplified further by abolishing the requirement for project partners' letters of accreditation to be signed by hand;
3. Points out that there are still problems as regards access to Erasmus+ funding in the 'youth' sector because the programme is managed on a decentralised basis by national agencies; calls on the Commission to take the necessary steps, for instance by centralising part of the funding within the executive agency; calls on the Commission, in addition, to provide the means necessary for all programme beneficiaries to become more involved, one example being to set up permanent sector-specific subcommittees, as provided for under Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013<sup>1</sup>;
4. Maintains that, to date, the key to the success of Erasmus+ has been university exchanges and that, in order to prevent this from being eroded, none of the funding should be used for another programme, nor should the scope of Erasmus+ be widened to encompass other recipients, for example migrants;
5. Notes the low take-up and inadequate geographical coverage of the Erasmus+ Student Loan Guarantee Facility; hopes that the recent direct agreement with Luxembourg University will offer indications as to a more effective loan model; urges the Commission and European Investment Fund to redouble their efforts to maximise the Facility's effectiveness and calls on the Commission to make a thorough assessment of the Facility's benefits;
6. Is alarmed by the chronically low project success rates under the Europe for Citizens programme and the Creative Europe Culture sub-programme (16% and 11% respectively in 2016); stresses that low success rates cause frustration among applicants and are symptomatic of inadequate levels of financing, which does not correspond to the ambitious goals of the programmes;
7. Points out that the Commission's own Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive

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<sup>1</sup> 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 (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50).

Agency (EACEA) says that the Europe for Citizens programme reached full maturity in 2016, in its third year of implementation; calls, therefore, on the Commission and Council to allow properly for the long time-frames that have proved necessary for full implementation of new programmes within the 2014-2020 MFF in order to prevent similar delays from occurring within the financial framework to be established after 2020;

8. Commends EACEA's role in implementing the three culture and education programmes, as evidenced by the positive evaluation of the Agency's work completed in 2016; welcomes EACEA's greater use of e-reporting for funded projects, which should improve data collection and project monitoring, help feed into the Commission's policy work and assist beneficiaries; is pleased to note that EACEA makes 92% of its payments within the Financial Regulation deadlines; given that education and culture programme beneficiaries are often very small organisations, calls on EACEA to strive for better results, potentially through an average time-to-pay indicator;
9. Notes the 2016 launch of the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility, with a budget of 121 million EUR up to 2022, and the initial interest shown by the sector and financial intermediaries; calls for quick implementation of the planned 60 million EUR frontloading of the Facility from the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI); recalls that loans complement other essential sources of funding to the sector, such as grants;
10. Is concerned by the very low level of EFSI funding that reached the education and cultural and creative sectors in 2016; considers that tailored, sector-specific support is essential to ensure that the cultural and creative sector benefits from EFSI loans;
11. Reiterates its support for independent media coverage of European affairs, notably through budgetary assistance for television, radio and online networks; welcomes the continuation of the grant for Euranet+ until 2018 and urges the Commission to find a more sustainable funding model for the network;
12. Remains concerned by the failure of the European Schools to address accounting shortcomings repeatedly identified by the European Court of Auditors and underlined by the European Parliament in its discharge reports; notes, for example, that, while overall the Schools have improved in terms of closure of accounts, two of the fourteen schools, as well as the Office of the Secretary-General, still failed to produce their accounts by the legal deadline; regrets that, despite the efforts made by the European Schools to enhance internal controls and the welcome introduction of an external audit, inadequacies persist with respect to procurement, recruitment and payment procedures;
13. Welcomes the fact that the Court of Auditors found no evidence of material errors, but regrets that it is unable to confirm that the School's financial management in 2016 had been carried out in accordance with the Financial Regulation, its Implementing Rules and the Staff Regulations; considers that the European Schools must have an adequate and responsible management system that meets basic requirements for the execution of public office, and therefore must meet higher standards for accountability and managerial responsibility; welcomes, in this regard, the adoption in 2017 of a revised Financial Regulation for the European Schools, which should provide the legal framework for addressing some of the deficiencies identified by the Court of Auditors,

notably with respect to the separation of accounting roles from other functions; recalls, however, that proper implementation of the new rules remains key to delivering on the Court of Auditors' recommendations; insists, therefore, that the Board of Governors of the European Schools report to the European Parliament on the progress of implementation measures before the end of 2018;

14. Recalls that the European Schools have a combined annual budget of nearly 300 million EUR, of which some 60 per cent comes from the European Commission; highlights that the 2018 budget includes appropriations designed to establish the new accounting governance and to implement the revised Financial Regulation; stresses that the Commission carries only one vote within the Board of Governors and that therefore the main responsibility for the European Schools' proper financial management lies with the Member States; calls on the Member States to support the Commission and the European Schools in their efforts to address the Court of Auditors' recommendations;
15. Considers that the UK's withdrawal from the European Union poses particularly challenging questions in relation to the European Schools, especially since around 21% of all European School pupils in the 2016-2017 school year were in the English language section (second only to the French language section) and English was the chosen second language of 61% of all European School pupils; is aware that the uncertainty surrounding the provision of English-language teaching after the UK's withdrawal is a cause for concern for parents and pupils at the European Schools; calls on the European Commission and the European Schools to report to the Committee on Culture and Education on its plans to deal with the specific challenges created by the UK's withdrawal and how it intends to continue to provide first-class English-language teaching within the European Schools going forward, including considerations for possible alternative contracting arrangements for teachers;
16. Points out that, as the Court of Auditors has stated, a new record was set in the financial year 2016 as regards payments carried over into future budgets; urges the Commission and Council to reduce the difference between commitment and payment appropriations to a minimum by making the necessary provision to meet contractual obligations to programme beneficiaries without delay;
17. Believes, that the EU budget needs to be made more independent from direct national contributions; supports the proposal to reform the own resources system.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	23.1.2018
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 24 -: 0 0: 3
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Isabella Adinolfi, Dominique Bilde, Andrea Bocskor, Nikolaos Chountis, Silvia Costa, Mircea Diaconu, Damian Dr ghici, Angel Dzhambazki, Jill Evans, María Teresa Giménez Barbat, Petra Kammerevert, Svetoslav Hristov Malinov, Curzio Maltese, Rupert Matthews, Stefano Maullu, Luigi Morgano, John Procter, Michaela Šojdrová, Yana Toom, Helga Trüpel, Sabine Verheyen, Julie Ward, Bogdan Brunon Wenta, Theodoros Zagorakis, Bogdan Andrzej Zdrojewski, Krystyna Łybacka
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Algirdas Saudargas

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>24</b>	<b>+</b>
ALDE	Mircea Diaconu, María Teresa Giménez Barbat, Yana Toom
ECR	Angel Dzhambazki, Rupert Matthews, John Procter
EFDD	Isabella Adinolfi
PPE	Andrea Bocskor, Svetoslav Hristov Malinov, Stefano Maullu, Algirdas Saudargas, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Bogdan Brunon Wenta, Theodoros Zagorakis, Bogdan Andrzej Zdrojewski
S&D	Silvia Costa, Damian Dr ghici, Petra Kammerevert, Krystyna Lybacka, Luigi Morgano, Julie Ward
Verts/ALE	Jill Evans, Helga Trüpel

<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>

<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
ENF	Dominique Bilde
GUE/NGL	Nikolaos Chountis, Curzio Maltese

**Key to symbols:**

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention