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*Committee on Culture and Education*

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## WORKING DOCUMENT

on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2009-2013)

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Marielle De Sarnez

## I. General presentation

### 1. The evolution of the Erasmus Mundus programme

The current Erasmus Mundus programme is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education which aims to promote the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. The new programme will also seek to promote intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries and to foster their development in the field of higher education.

From the mid-term evaluation report for the period 2004-2006 some rather positive results have emerged.

Over the period 2004-2006 the programme included:

- 2 325 scholarships for students from third countries
- 19 partnerships
- 23 projects to increase the attractiveness of European higher education
- 323 participating higher education institutions in Europe and third countries.

The total available budget for the 2004-2008 programming period was **€230 million**.

However, in 2006 some external cooperation ‘windows’ were set up in order to allow a higher number of foreign students to study in the EU, thanks to scholarships from external funding in the context of partnerships with several European universities, without, however, any obligation to do an Erasmus Mundus Masters Course. These ‘windows’ supplemented the programme’s initial budget between 2005 and 2007 by 66.1 million euro, thereby allowing 1595 additional scholarships to be granted (for students and personnel).

### 2. The new Erasmus Mundus programme (2009-2013)

- In the current proposal for a decision, the Commission provides for, inter alia:
  - the extension of the Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 programme to joint doctoral programmes;
  - a budget of **€493 million** for Action 1 (Erasmus Mundus masters and doctorates) and Action 3 (initiatives to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education), and
  - the establishment of scholarships for European students moving to study in other EU countries.
- The new programme will be based on three actions:

**Action 1** (joint masters and doctoral programmes, scholarships) aims to promote the excellence of European higher education in the world.

**Action 2** (partnerships with third-country higher education institutions including scholarships) is an external cooperation action. It seeks to develop human resources and the international

cooperation capacity of higher education institutions in third countries, in line with EU external policy.

**Action 3** (specific communication and information measures) seeks to enhance the visibility of European higher education on the international stage.

- *Budget*

The total budget earmarked for the 2009-2013 programme is €950 million. It is split into two separate parts: one budget for Actions 1 and 3 and a separate budget for Action 2.

The budget for Actions 1 and 3 (joint masters and doctorates, scholarships and projects to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education) is therefore € 493.69 million. This budget is managed by DG EAC.

The budget for Action 2 (partnerships in the context of external cooperation) is financed by external cooperation instruments and is managed by DG RELEX and AIDCO.

According to the Commission proposal, the budget for Action 2 is estimated at **€460 million** and will be distributed, **indicatively**, between various external policy and development instruments:

- European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI): 140 million euro
- Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI): 240 million euro
- Financing instrument for cooperation with industrialised and other high-income countries (ICI): 20 million euro
- Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA): 30 million euro
- European Development Fund (10<sup>th</sup> EDF): 30 million euro

## **II. Remarks on the proposal concerning the Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 programme**

Your rapporteur regrets that the Commission can only give an estimate of how the budget for Action 2 is to be allocated. This large budget (460 million) also involves a certain lack of detail, especially with regard to:

- the exact amount to be allocated for the mobility of third-country students and European students, and
- the geographical areas to be determined by DG RELEX as priority areas and thus eligible for this exchange programme.

### **1. A partly 'indicative' budget**

It should be stressed that DG RELEX establishes its priorities for each third country in a strategic document drawn up for a seven-year period. Accordingly, for 2007-2013 its priorities are established on the basis of an approximate budget which can be revised in 2010.

Therefore, the field of higher education might no longer be considered a priority for certain geographical areas when DG RELEX establishes its new guidelines for the next period.

## **2. Lack of clarity regarding the use of Action 2 funds**

The budget proposed for Action 2 should be read carefully, as there are two sorts of clearly separate funds:

- those concerning development policy (the EDF, based on the Cotonou agreements of June 2000, revised in 2005, and the DCI, provided for in the EU budget) and
- those concerning external relations: the ENPI, IPA and ICI, managed under the external relations policy.

In the current version of the programme it is regrettable that there is a certain **lack of clarity and transparency** with regard to the final amount to be fixed for each of these instruments, how that amount will be used to finance the mobility of third-country and European students and the relevant conditions attached (e.g. whether or not it is compulsory to return to the third country of origin after the exchange). This information should not be set out in the calls for tender alone.

## **3. Geographical distribution and gender equality not properly respected**

The geographical distribution of the partnerships under Action 2, decided on solely by DG RELEX and AIDCO, could lead once again, for example, to over-representation of Asian students to the detriment of students from Mediterranean or ACP countries, as is the case in the current programme.

It would also be desirable to avoid certain countries from being under-represented in Erasmus Mundus Masters consortia, as is currently the case for Greece, Austria and Slovakia.

Indicatively, 273 Erasmus Mundus scholarships have been granted for 2007-2008, including 75 scholarships for North America, 27 for India, 21 for China and 16 for Russia. In addition to those are scholarships granted under 'external cooperation windows', i.e. 63 scholarships for the Balkans, 37 for China and **403** for India.

*DG RELEX and AIDCO's choice of countries to participate in partnerships is therefore crucial in ensuring a balanced representation of students according to their geographical origin.*

Equally, the principle of gender equality must be effectively respected when accepting students in partnerships, as is already the case in the selection of student candidates for the Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses. For example, out of the 403 students from India having received a scholarship for 2007-2008, only 103 were women.

Although these two principles of balanced representation (geographical and gender) are included in and applied by the current Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses, they only appear to be very partially applied when it come to partnerships with third countries.

### III. Rapporteur's suggestions

The aim of this programme is to make European higher education attractive in terms of both its quality and the welcome it offers. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that the increase in the number of beneficiaries of scholarships does not lead to lower quality in the welcome given to participants and the way they are attended to.

It is also essential to submit a clear programme so that each student knows what course he or she will be able to attend, what funding they will receive, through what scholarship and for how long. This will make it easier to communicate and promote the programme internationally.

#### 1. Action 1

- Special attention should be paid to the measures to be taken in order to help students obtain visas, for example by publishing and distributing a good practice guide for the institutions which coordinate the consortia, or by drawing up a special 'Erasmus Mundus' fact sheet;
- access to the programme should also be provided for disabled students, whilst respecting the principle of gender equality in order to ensure a balance;
- measures in favour of public-private partnerships between universities and undertakings should be advocated, as these could enable courses to be more tailored to labour market requirements whilst facilitating access to traineeships;
- efforts should also be stepped up to ensure that European languages are not seen as an obstacle by foreign students, but rather as value added to their course.

#### 2. Action 2

- Clearer, more transparent wording should be found so as to be able to determine precisely the **minimum** amount to be allocated to each different financial instrument in the context of external cooperation;
- precise details should be given as to the number of scholarships to be granted under this action to third-country students and to European students;
- as far as the selection procedure is concerned, the principles of gender equality and balanced geographical representation should be respected.

#### 3. Action 3

- Information on this programme should be stepped up and improved by giving clear information, in several languages, aimed at a large number of universities in third countries;
- the greatest possible number of universities should be provided with a standardised information sheet to be put on their websites;

- use should also be made of the Commission representations in those countries, since many students refer to them for information on this exchange programme.