



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 21.12.2017  
C(2017) 8576 final

*Dear President,*

*The Commission would like to thank the Bundesrat for its Opinion concerning the Communication on a renewed EU agenda for higher education {COM(2017) 247 final}.*

*The Commission takes seriously the concerns expressed by the Bundesrat in its Opinion and would like to assure the Bundesrat that it fully respects the competence of Member States in the field of higher education and the autonomy of higher education institutions. All actions described in the Communication will be developed in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity and in close cooperation with Member States.*

*The Commission is pleased that the Bundesrat shares the view that effective higher education and training systems are the basis for a fair, open and democratic society. It agrees with the Bundesrat that higher education should not be viewed exclusively in connection with the labour market, but it also has a much wider societal function. This is emphasised in all of the Communication's four key priorities, particularly in the goal of building inclusive systems, in which higher education institutions develop strong links with their local communities. An example of such civic engagement is the role played by students and staff in developing initiatives to support the integration of refugees.*

*The Commission recognises the value of the informal learning gained by students taking part in volunteering activities. For this reason, it is supporting through the Erasmus+ programme higher education institutions that wish to award European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) points in recognition of such learning. Nevertheless, the Commission respects the individual decision of higher education institutions regarding if, how and to what extent they wish to recognise informal learning.*

*With regard to the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, the Commission takes note of the Bundesrat's remarks on the purpose of e-learning modules. The Commission proposal aims to support Member States to develop recognition procedures by learning from best practice and sharing experiences and challenges.*

*The Commission shares the views of the Bundesrat on the value of mobility, which is the area where the majority of Erasmus+ funds are channelled. However, cooperation amongst higher education institutions and between higher education intuitions and other education sectors or stakeholders is of great value in developing and implementing*

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*educational reforms and initiatives. It is also fully in line with the aims and actions of the Erasmus+ programme.*

*With regard to cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Commission would like to clarify that all actions presented in the Communication aim to support Member States in developing their reforms, but any engagement remains voluntary.*

*Concerning the priority on excellence in skills development – in particular concerning curricular reforms; the demand for graduates in science, technology, engineering, (arts) and mathematics; and short learning programmes – the Commission views each of these as a means of opening up higher education. They can broaden the choice available to people at different stages in their lives as well as support higher education institutions and Member States in sharing information on challenges and initiatives.*

*As regards the Bundesrat's queries about the knowledge hub, the Commission believes that its objective is to improve evidence-based policy-making. It will help make best use of data in order to support public authorities in Member States in designing and implementing their reforms. With regard to financing of U-Multirank, the Commission has reduced its co-financing contribution to about 50% of the total costs as the first step in the direction of financial independence.*

*The Commission has also taken due note of the concerns raised by the Bundesrat about the exchange of student data. The Commission would like to take the opportunity to clarify that electronic exchanges of student data would allow cross-border access to such data and to student services. This will certainly be performed in full compliance with national and European Union data protection rules.*

*The Commission wishes to confirm that the translation of the title of the Communication in the German version has been duly corrected in order to bring it in line with the English version, which reads 'A Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education'.*

*Finally, the Commission would like to inform the Bundesrat that the ideas and actions set out in the Communication, as well as other Member States' initiatives were discussed by the Education Ministers at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 20 November 2017. Following these deliberations, the Council adopted conclusions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education.*

*The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Bundesrat and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Frans Timmermans  
First Vice-President*

*Tibor Navracsics  
Member of the Commission*