

## Report Thematic session 2: "European Education Area"

by Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, DG EAC

Moderator: Anita Toien Johansen

Rapporteur: Abderezak Ali Abdurehman

Ms. Toien Johansen, policy officer for international youth cooperation through the Erasmus+ Programme, began the session by carrying out a voting poll in order to get a broad idea of the audience's perspectives on the European Education Area.

The floor has then been passed to Ms. Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ at DG EAC. The speaker was pleased to find out that mobility is a paramount shared priority of both the audience and the EC. She then brought the attention of the listeners, to the fact that education and youth are embraced by high level officials. One of the key issues for the debate launched by The European Commission in March 2017 concerns the **social dimension of Europe**. The reflection about the future of the Union also entails a reflection on the **strength of the common identity**. When the European values and democracies are tested by awakening populist forces at home and abroad or by the spreading of "fake news" and the manipulation of information networks, it is the moment when the European leaders and the EU institutions must react. That is why European leaders decided to meet on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg to discuss the future role of education and culture in strengthening the sense of belonging together and being part of a cultural community. At this meeting the European Commission set out its vision and concrete steps to create a **European Education Area (EEA)** by 2025.

The speaker outlined that in Gothenburg, the leaders were invited to discuss and give a strategic orientation on **six key policy suggestions** from the European Commission. The presentation focused on three of them, which are linked to these three messages from the vision: making mobility a reality for all, the mutual recognition of diplomas, and improving language learning.

**Making mobility a reality for all:** The **Erasmus Programme** which was launched as a pilot for higher education exchange in 1987 **has gradually evolved** to encompass vocational and adult education, as well as training, volunteering, pupil and school exchanges, youth exchanges and sporting activities. Between 2014-2020, the programme will cover **3.7% of young people in the EU with a budget of EUR 14.7 billion**. The EEA sets a vision to make mobility a reality for all by building on the positive experiences of the Erasmus+ programme. It aims to at least double the current figure which is around 3.5%, and optimistically go as far as covering one third of the European young population.

**Mutual recognition of diplomas:** The **intergovernmental Bologna Process** has facilitated, but not ensured, the mutual recognition of diplomas in higher education across 48 countries. The **European Credit and Transfer System** regulates the accumulation and transfer of higher education study credits, so that studying in one country is recognized in others. But, a young person who wants to have his or her upper secondary level qualification recognised in another member state frequently faces obstacles, because the decisions on admission to a particular programme are left to the discretion of a university. The EEA aims to initiate a new process, the 'Sorbonne process', to politically and technically prepare the ground for the Commission proposal on mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas. Bologna Ministerial Conference (Paris, May 2018).

**Improving language learning:** The participants were invited to participate in a game. They were asked to stand up if they speak this number of languages, starting with one then two, three ... etc. One trainee was able to speak 10 languages and she was promised a prize. In May 2018, they will be adopting a **Recommendation on improving language learning in Europe** starting from early childhood education and agreeing a common benchmark for linguistic competences at the level of upper secondary education (mother tongue plus two by 2025). Increasing **the efficiency of language teaching and learning**, and developing a **pilot project for bilingual teaching options** in border regions and in areas where inhabitants use more than one language (EUR 5 million)

### Q&A session with Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot

Question 1: How you intend to create a mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diploma when the qualities of universities are different?

- ✓ It is a process and requires the involvement of everyone concerned. Ranking of universities are not also that objective.

Question 2: In your speech you mentioned the plan to increase the quantity of participants in Erasmus+ Programme. Is increasing the quantity without quality a good idea? The amount of money paid to participants is not enough forcing them to seek other sources of income to perform their Erasmus Programme. Isn't it advisable to increase the amount paid to participant than get even more participants? The same goes with language, in order to learn a language you need to pay money which makes it less feasible to disadvantaged people to learn many languages.

- ✓ The money was not supposed to make up for the difference in the income gap between countries.

Question 3: I participated in two Erasmus Programmes. I had to work when I did my Erasmus, making it difficult for me to attend in all activities. About making diploma recognition the same, it must be applied to all fields. For example, I am a lawyer and I had to do a year and half more to make my qualification equivalent.

- ✓ We are in the process of modernizing the rules.

Question 4: What is the commission doing to reach out to part of the population who can't get the opportunity to be participate in Erasmus Programme?

- ✓ We are trying to diversity the programme and reach out to more people in the form of short-term mobility.

Question 5: In Portugal I faced teachers who don't speak proper English and hindered the mobility. There are negative reviews about the Bologna process. What are your views?

- ✓ We encourage teachers to take English courses.
- ✓ The Bologna process aims to build transparency in mobility and doesn't prescribe the exact amount of years. In addition it provides recognition and quality assurance.