

ASSEMBLY OF THE PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

OPINION

COM(2012)515

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – Report on the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II programme (2009 – 2013)

PART I – INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In accordance with Article 7 of Law No 43/2006 of 25 August 2006, amended by Law No 21/2012 of 17 May 2012 regulating the monitoring, examination and issuing of opinions by the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic in the context of the process of EU integration, as well as the methodology for providing scrutiny of EU initiatives approved on 20 January 2010, the European Affairs Committee received the REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – Report on the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II programme (2009 – 2013) [COM(2012)515].

Given its subject matter, the above-mentioned initiative was referred to the Committee on Education, Science and Culture, which analysed it and approved the report annexed to and forming an integral part of this Opinion.

PART II - GROUNDS

1. This initiative relates to the REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – Report on the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II programme (2009 – 2013).
2. The initiative under examination states that the European Commission began the interim evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II (EM) programme with an eye to the requirements of Decision No 1298/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 (the Erasmus Mundus Decision)¹.
3. This evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency of the programme, paying particular attention to the novelties introduced in phase II.
4. The EM II programme (2009 – 2013) aims to enhance the quality of European higher education, to help improve students' career prospects, to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures through international cooperation and to contribute to the sustainable development of third countries in the field of higher education, in line with EU external policy objectives.
5. The EM programme has a budget of over €50 million, with some €494 million allocated to Actions 1 and 3 from the EU's education budget and €460 million allotted to Action 2 from a number of different funding instruments. The EM II programme 2009-2013 was implemented as follows:
 - Action 1: EM joint programmes of outstanding quality at masters and doctoral levels, including scholarships/fellowships for participating in these programmes;

¹ OJ L 340 of 19 December 2008, p.83.

- Action 2: EM Partnerships between European and third-country higher-education institutions, including scholarships and fellowships for mobility at all academic levels. This action replaces the former 'External Cooperation Window' scheme;
 - Action 3: Promotion of European higher education through projects to enhance the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination and a centre of excellence at world level.
6. EM II novelties: Under Phase II the scope of the EM programme was extended by incorporating the following key new dimensions:
- extending joint programmes to the doctoral level;
 - offering scholarships for European students;
 - integrating the 'External Cooperation Window' scheme into the EM programme as Action 2 and widening its scope;
 - allowing third-country higher education institutions to participate in the EM joint programmes.
7. The report states that the programme remains highly relevant in promoting excellence, international cooperation, mobility and academic capacity building. During the first half of the EM programme (2009 – 2011), it showed its effectiveness in strengthening the international orientation strategy of participating institutions while also providing sustainability to strategic networking activities. The interim evaluation of EM finds that the programme has been efficiently implemented with a very good cost/benefit ratio.
8. Lastly, it should be said that the opinion presented by the Committee on Education, Science and Culture was approved and reflects the tenor of the initiative. Accordingly, this Opinion reproduces all the content of the "Grounds" and "Conclusions". This serves to avoid repetition of analysis and consequent redundancy.

PART III – OPINION

In the light of the information set out above and the report of the relevant committee, the European Affairs Committee's opinion is as follows:

1. There is no reason to assess this initiative's compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.
2. Concerning the questions raised in the grounds, the European Affairs Committee will continue to monitor the legislative process relating to these initiatives, particularly by exchanging information with the Government.

Palácio de São Bento, 12 February 2013

Rapporteur

(Duarte Marques)

Committee Chairman

(Paulo Mota Pinto)

PART FOUR – ANNEX

Report from the Committee on Education, Science and Culture

Opinion

Report on the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II Programme (2009-2013) COM (2012) 515

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CONTENTS

PART I – INTRODUCTORY NOTE

PART II - GROUNDS

- 1. Erasmus Mundus II Programme**
- 2. Conclusions of the evaluation**
- 3. Evaluation recommendations**

PART III — OPINION OF THE RAPPORTEUR

PART IV - CONCLUSIONS

PART I – INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Context of the report

In accordance with Article 7 of Law No 43/2006 of 25 August 2006 on the monitoring, examination and issuing of opinions by the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic in the context of the process of EU integration, the Report on the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus II Programme (2009/-2013) was sent to the Committee on Education, Science and Culture, in view of its subject matter, so that that Committee could examine the initiative and prepare this opinion.

This interim report derives directly from Article 13 of Decision No 1298/2008/EC (Erasmus Mundus) of the European Parliament and of the Council, and aims to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency of the Erasmus Mundus II programme, paying particular attention to the novelties introduced in phase II of the programme over the first two years of its implementation (2009-2011).

The methodology adopted for the interim assessment was based on the responses of the stakeholders and interested parties to a questionnaire containing a set of 45 evaluation questions and defining explicit indicators and judgement criteria, which were evaluated by the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) for the purposes of the evaluation by the Steering Group for the programme. This is drawn from several Directorates-General of the European Commission (Education and Culture, Development and Cooperation – Europe Aid and Enlargement), the European External Action Service and the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency.

PART II - GROUNDS

The Erasmus Mundus II Programme

The Erasmus Mundus II programme, to be implemented between 2009 and 2013, primarily aims to enhance the quality of European higher education, to help improve students' career prospects, to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures through international cooperation and to contribute to the sustainable development of third countries in the field of higher education, in accordance with EU external policy objectives.

With an overall budget of approximately €54 million, the programme is structured in three main components, namely:

- Action 1: EM joint programmes of outstanding quality at masters and doctoral levels, including scholarships/fellowships for participating in these programmes;
- Action 2: EM Partnerships between European and third-country higher-education institutions, including scholarships and fellowships for mobility at all academic levels.
- Action 3: Promotion of European higher education through projects to enhance the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination and a centre of excellence at world level.

Approximately €494 million are allocated to actions 1 and 3 (from the EU's education budget), while the remaining €460 million allotted to Action 2 are from a number of different funding instruments.

In the first phase of the programme, the main novelties introduced into Erasmus Mundus II were extending joint doctorate programmes, offering scholarships for European students, integrating the 'External Cooperation Window' scheme (as Action 2) and the participation of third-country higher education institutions in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Programmes.

2. Conclusions of the evaluation

2.1. New elements of the Erasmus Mundus II Programme

The main conclusions of the interim evaluation regarding the new elements of the programme are the following:

- Joint doctoral programmes: The evaluation recognises their considerable added value and how they have a positive impact on graduates' professional success (in entering the employment market and obtaining further research positions). It even concludes that this is one of the most successful innovations of the new phase.
- New Action 2 (the former External Cooperation Window): The evaluation recognises the double objective of reconciling sustainable development while preventing a brain drain, and concludes that its effects were more complementary than contradictory. It also emphasised the need for more reciprocal relationships between higher education institutions from the EU and third countries;
- Offering scholarships for European Union students: While the programme offered advantages to EU students looking for work or further research positions, the report stresses that this may be considered one of the least successful of the Erasmus Mundus II novelties, given that the value of the grants offered (and of the Category B grants in particular) was not enough to be sufficiently attractive to students;
- Opening Action 1 to third-country higher-education institutions: The evaluation recognised the benefit for institutions in being able to join the consortia, but it stresses that such participation is made difficult by regulations, governance issues, limited

resources and specific features relating to the various subject areas, which are evidence of the need more systemic measures to address them in the future;

2.2. Other general considerations

Generally the report takes the view that, during the two-year period 2009-2011, the Erasmus Mundus programme contributed to 'strengthening Europe's competitive advantage in higher education by helping higher education systems to offer a more homogeneous image under the joint programmes' and also that its objectives tied in with those pursued by the EU.

It is, however, expressly emphasised that, in the future, EM II could 'further strengthen its focus on the employability of young people, which is emphasised in Europe 2020'. It even stresses that, while the programme does offer valuable career skills for graduates, actual employability remains uneven across regions and subject areas.

2.3. Relevance

The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the programme, even if the target groups and stakeholders were quite diverse. It also emphasises in this regard the need to continue to develop strategies for avoiding a brain drain from third countries, particularly by strengthening the development component.

2.4. Effectiveness

In spite of noteworthy advances in terms of the programme's impact on the legislation necessary for the recognition of joint degrees and credit recognition mechanisms (especially in Neighbourhood countries) and its value in persuading policy-makers and stakeholders, the evaluation maintains that its impact on the Bologna process was mixed and varied across different countries.

Thus the report stresses three difficulties: 1) obstacles relating to the diversity of national higher education systems; 2) obstacles relating to the design of the programme; 3) obstacles relating to the financing and the administrative burden.

2.5. Sustainability

A substantial number of the beneficiaries stressed the lack of human resources in sufficient quantity to cope with all the joint workload arising from the programme, although the Erasmus Mundus label is seen as a factor which increases access to external funding for various institutions.

2.6. Efficiency

In this respect, the report concludes that the management is efficient, stressing that objectives are to be achieved by 2013 with lower costs than initially anticipated and that the outputs of the programme were being produced with analogous or even lower costs than those of similar scholarships schemes. The beneficiaries, however, assess their participation in the programme as burdensome, something which merits additional reflection.

2.7. Programme management

Lastly, it also emerges clearly from the report that, although the beneficiaries' assessment of the preparation and implementation of the projects was positive, they also find the administrative workload excessive and therefore suggest simplifications.

3. Evaluation recommendations

The recommendations arising from the evaluation and the conclusions drawn by the European Commission concerning the future of the programme — in the second two years of its implementation and beyond 2013 — are summarily identified in four key ideas:

3.1. **Relevance:** The relevance of the Erasmus Mundus programme must involve greater integration with other EU programmes. The Commission embraces the conclusion, identifying the intention to take it into account in the design of the future integrated and streamlined *Erasmus for All* programme for education, training, youth and sport.

3.2. **Effectiveness:** In relation to employability a greater concern for vocational education and greater involvement of employers is recommended, while the need to include a wider range of institutions so as to strengthen the promotion of excellence is emphasised and continued action by the Commission to facilitate the visa process for beneficiaries is recommended. The Commission will also pursue this objective and undertakes to help to improve the visa process as far as possible.

3.3. **Sustainability:** Where sustainability is concerned, the report confines itself to pointing out the need to improve the use of the Union's limited financial resources, the need to bring institutions and networks of institutions to maturity and recommending sharing good practices. The Commission points to the work already undertaken in establishing the 'Erasmus Mundus' brand name and implementing clusters regrouping best practices.

3.4. **Efficiency:** Lastly, more balance is recommended between the various actions, particularly after 2013, with improved monitoring and evaluation of future projects and the streamlining of the programme, also with effect from 2013. Here again, the Commission extends its support for the recommendation for the design of the future integrated programme referred to above (which is already under way).

PART III — OPINION OF THE RAPPORTEUR

1. This report on the interim evaluation of the Mundus II programme for 2009-2011 is an important element for diagnosing the current state of one of the main initiatives for the internationalisation of the European higher education area, which aims to link the aims of the Bologna process with the spirit of the Erasmus programme while opening up the advantages created by both these to the EU's neighbours and international partners.
2. However, some elements of the interim evaluation report fall short of what might be expected of it, in terms of correcting design errors affecting this second phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme and analysing the initiatives intended to replace or reformulate it post-2013, and in particular with regard to the identification of the need for financing.
3. First, the report does not identify in sufficient detail the causes of the programme's mixed and not always positive impact on the achievement of the Bologna process (nor does it identify any remedies). While the positive impact on countries in the EU's neighbourhood strikes a positive note (without however specifying what reality this vague geographical reference relates to), the report does not specify which negative cases were identified or where the main obstacles are to be found. In particular, it does not say whether the problems detected can be extended to models for the organisation of higher education in other countries.

4. Secondly, the report is not very incisive, either, as an evaluation of the financial resources budgeted for the programme. It alludes solely to the need to strengthen the efficient use of the existing scarce financial resources, although several aspects of the analysis yield evidence that the success of the programme is at times prejudiced by the fact that the beneficiaries find the reporting frequency burdensome and that the amounts of the grants offered are insufficiently attractive for students from the European Union. This is even identified as one of the least successful aspects of the second phase of the programme.
5. What is more, although it identifies the institutions' complaints regarding the excessive administrative and bureaucratic burden, the report makes no more than passing reference to a sparse few simplification measures or areas in which the institutions could be more efficient in streamlining the programme.
6. Lastly, the report disregards one aspect which would be decidedly useful in scrutinising the programme and how it has developed since its first phase, which would entail identifying the countries of origin of the beneficiaries and the partner institutions in the consortia.
7. Unfortunately, this paucity of findings and recommendations is not what is to be desired of an interim report, which would permit a change of course in the execution of the second two-year period of the programme and in the design and funding of what — from the European Commission's viewpoint — will be the successor to Erasmus Mundus II (and to various other programmes for increasing mobility in the areas of education, training and youth).

PART IV - CONCLUSIONS

In view of the foregoing, the Committee on Education, Science and Culture has reached the following conclusions:

1. There is no reason to assess this initiative's compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, given that it is an interim evaluation of the Mundus II programme, currently under way;
2. Analysis of this initiative points to the usefulness of continuing to monitor the Erasmus Mundus II Programme during the second two-year period of its implementation (2011-2013) and likewise monitoring the measures to reconfigure the various EU programmes currently under way with the aim of shaping the future *Erasmus for All* programme, a subject this Commission has already analysed in opinions.
3. The Committee on Education, Science and Culture has concluded its scrutiny of this initiative and, under Law No 43/2006 of 25 August 2006, hereby submits this opinion for reference to the European Affairs Committee for its opinion.

Palácio de São Bento, 27 November 2012