

# Report of the event 'Towards more exchanges for pupils'

European Parliament, 21 March 2018

Hosted by: MEP Emilian Pavel

In his welcoming speech, MEP Emilian Pavel highlighted how clear policies should be established to encourage more pupils mobility, including in particular the recognition of study periods abroad since during these times students acquire global competences that, although not immediately visible, are in fact invaluable.

## *1st panel: Recognition of school study periods abroad*

Elisa Briga, Head of Advocacy at EFIL, presented the current situation within Europe on the recognition of school study periods abroad. As of 2018 there are about 350.000 students mobile in Europe every year mainly due to family relocation or long-term pupil exchange (e.g. AFS, YFU). The data collected in January 2018 shows that for students going abroad on long-term mobility (3-10 months) from general schools (upper-secondary, no VET): 9 countries have no recognition of the study period abroad while 15 have some form of recognition law. A detailed overview can be found in the [study](#).

Petra Goran, Policy Officer, DG EAC School Unit, European Commission, presented the outcomes of the consultations launched on the proposal for recommendation. What emerged is that recognition is still problematic, there are good existing tools that should be implemented better; there is a need for more cooperation among Member States especially on increasing transparency and improving quality insurance mechanism. The suggested principle that the Commission wants to recommend to member states to adopt for the recognition of study periods abroad is that any study period abroad up to one year which is documented in terms of learning outcome should be recognized and should allow for enrolment into the next grade.

Ferre Windey, Board member of OBESSU, brought the voice of students to the discussion. He pointed out that recognition of study periods abroad increases school students' accessibility to exchanges and that further barriers for school students with learning difficulties or difficult socio-economic background need to be tackled, and they require additional learning and financial support to allow for study periods abroad. For school students recognition is crucial yet not the final steps toward a comprehensive legal framework to foster more pupils mobility.

## Comments and questions

What would be EFIL's recommendations? Elisa Briga: a Bologna process for secondary schools would not be good: the point of exchange is to learn from and cope with diversity. We recommend a shift from a content-based to competence-based curriculum for exchanges as the pillar of the system.

What might be difficulties in getting this proposal approved? Petra Goran: though it's hard to predict what will emerge from negotiations, so far member states have not shown resistance to this proposal.

Adrian Iordache, from NARIC Romania brought the example of the positive experience of Romania with recognising study periods abroad, which allows students to start back in the next grade with no negative repercussions.

### *2nd panel: Pupil mobility in the Erasmus+ Programme*

MEP Milan Zver, the standing rapporteur on the Erasmus+ Programme, announced that he has asked the European Commission, in the implementation report, to strengthen the school education dimension of the programme, allowing for more pupil mobility and simplification of funding and administrative procedures. He declared his concern for the decreased number of mobile pupils in Erasmus+ in comparison with Comenius (54% less pupils). The solutions he proposed were moving Pupil Mobility to Key Action 1 (currently only in Key Action 2) and giving access to non-profit organisations in the programme, which can bring valuable support to schools.

He further mentioned that in his report, he will call for better recognition for individual pupil mobility as well as for more funding for the entire Erasmus+ programme. He expressed his great support for both More Pupil Mobility and Recognise Study Abroad campaigns.

Valentina Pomatto, Advocacy and Projects Coordinator at EEE-YFU, addressed the fact that the many obstacles in the current programme architecture have reduced the visibility of the pupil mobility as an option available in Erasmus+. She underlined that the possibility for expert mobility providers to be partners with schools is present, but there are several factors that make this very difficult to be put into practice: Erasmus+ Programme Guides have not explicitly indicated that partnerships between schools and exchange organisations are a viable option, so National Agencies have formulated their strategies within their national context and have advised applicants in different ways. Small schools with fewer resources do not have the capacity to apply and run such projects. As a best practice she named the VET (Vocational Education and Training) sector where the synergy between formal and non-formal education has proven to work very well, and could be replicated in general secondary schools.

Michael Teutsch, Head of School Unit at the European Commission, announced that despite the UK leaving and therefore a reduction of budget, the Erasmus budget should not be subject to any cuts, which gives great hope for the future of one of the most appreciated programmes in the EU. He underlined that in the current architecture of the programme, pupil mobility was not

actually foreseen, due to the legislators demands at the time. However, the current political direction is different, and pupil mobility is seen as very important. Stronger focus on pupil mobility would increase accessibility and balance, by including the school sector along with the higher education institutions. He underlined that given the current situation in Europe, where big parts of the population are questioning the European values, access to making a real experience of Europe, especially very early in life, can really make a difference in increasing mutual understanding and tolerance. To facilitate this process, some changes have already been made to the current programme to make the application easier for School Partnerships.

Yasen Gyurov, Chair of the Education Committee at Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, said that due to the support of the Parliament, Commission and Council of the EU, the budget of the Erasmus+ will likely be substantially increased and that boosting school and VET mobility are now priorities. He underlined that short-term exchanges could be a solution to address these priorities. Another priority of the Council that was mentioned is again inclusiveness, but also overcoming of the digital divide in Europe. The Bulgarian Presidency will also put an accent on digitalisation, digital citizenship, modernisation and virtual mobility in the future programme.

### **Comments and questions**

#### How will you envision short-term mobility?

Gyurov: We see short-term mobility more inclusive because a lot of pupils can not go abroad for an entire year, due to reasons such as financial burdens or curricula, but with short-term exchanges they would still be able to touch European integration. Virtual mobility should also be explored.

Teutsch: We envision full flexibility in the future programme, so the decision between short or long term will be fully left to the applicants. We will promote both equally.

Pomatto: As expert exchange organisations, we can see a different impact on competencies, attitudes, values etc. between short and long-term exchanges. Long-term mobility, as proven well by studies, has a stronger impact on competences' development. We recognise that short-term exchanges should be available to increase inclusiveness, but should not be prioritised over long-term exchanges. We would add that another solution to increase inclusiveness is the opportunity to open up to partnerships between schools and exchange organisations, which is very currently very limited in the field of pupil mobility.