

European Students' Union (ESU)

Fighting for students' rights since 1982

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Resolution on the re-association of Switzerland to Erasmus+

Since 2014, Switzerland is not part of the Erasmus+ programme anymore. It currently has the status of third-country and is placed in the last of the 14 regions, specified as a country not covered by the External Action Instruments. Without its participation in the programme, it has failed to meet the general average European growth in student mobility by a significant amount.¹ This and other negative circumstances for European student mobility to or from Switzerland are the reason why we need to speak up².

In 2021, when the new Erasmus+ programme started, the Swiss government had not prepared any reassociation plans. Considering the many efforts that have been made since 2014, such as conferences³, demonstrations⁴, statements⁵, petitions⁶, motions⁷ coming from Swiss students, parliamentarians and stakeholders in the field of education, mobility and economics, this negligence by the Swiss Government upsets us deeply⁸. Taking a closer look, it's become clear that the biggest obstacle for the reassociation of Switzerland to Erasmus+ does not simply lie in a lack of political will but in the entanglement with the single market access to the European Economic Area (EEA). As the negotiations about the Institutional

¹ Swiss Agency for Mobility Movetia "Mobility Monitoring":
<https://www.movetia.ch/news-events/mobilitaetsmonitoring>

and comparison of Switzerland with Austria:

<https://www.movetia.ch/news-events/erasmus-kooperation-die-schweiz-hinkt-hinterher>

² Movetia booklet on the internationalisation of higher education:

https://www.movetia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Bereich_4/Praxis_Wissen/Wissen/Movetia_Cahier_Erasmus_Hoher_Education_200622.pdf

³ Conference report on national exchange and mobility strategy organised by Movetia :

https://www.movetia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Bereich_4/Konferenz/Bericht_%C3%BCber_die_1._Konferenz_zu_Austausch_und_Mobilit%C3%A4t_2018.pdf

⁴ Reactionate demonstration to the ending of the Swiss participation in the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes:

<https://www.landbote.ch/news/standard/studierende-beerdigen-erasmus-auf-dem-bundesplatz-in-bern/story/19006095>

⁵ Statement of the Swiss cantons for the full association of Switzerland to the Erasmus+ programme:

https://kdk.ch/de/aktuell/medienmitteilungen/medienmitteilung/?tx_ttnews%5D=3671&cHash=354bac068552da67d7d81438e2518b19

⁶ Petition for the full association of Switzerland to the European mobility programme Erasmus+ by 2021:

https://www.sajv.ch/de/spezielle-seiten/news/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=313&cHash=be7bab8b3fb410434debd93dd7fa6218

⁷ Motion on the full association of Switzerland to Erasmus+ programme from 2021 :

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefft?AffairId=20173630>

⁸ Parliamentary motion concerning the financing of the Erasmus+ programme:

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefft?AffairId=20213975>

Agreement (InstA) between Switzerland and the EU broke down, bilateral relations threaten to be eroded and the question whether Switzerland can rejoin the Erasmus+ programme floats in uncertainty. We highly condemn any ties between the Erasmus+ programme and economic issues⁹ as ultimately it is the students that suffer unnecessarily from such political decisions.

The re-association to the Erasmus+ programme represents two key potentials for Swiss higher education. First, in the field of global mobility, Erasmus+ promotes internationalisation of students and university staff in which interculturality, personal and specialist skills are boosted. This is a necessary feature to enhance their employability as well as chances of access to the labour market. Further, an association with such a framework programme would grant standardised quality and conditions for all institutions. In addition to this, the potential of individual mobility could be extended. As of now, the Swiss programme solely covers student and staff mobility in Europe but does not offer any global mobility schemes, blended mobility or virtual learning activities programmes nor does it cover the many other youth projects and mobility in the field of non-formal and informal education the Erasmus+ programme offers. The second focus of the Erasmus+ programme is cross-border cooperation in the area of higher education. Promoting cooperation projects enhances the innovation transfer and knowledge-sharing. These are crucial for the development and the quality of higher education which results in the enhanced competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area. It has been shown that cooperation projects lead to long-term education and research cooperation, as well as benefit all institutions participating.

The re-association of Switzerland in the Erasmus+ programme further extends the educational and cultural opportunities for the European students. As it stands, Switzerland is a blind spot on the Erasmus+ map which keeps the European Youth from experiencing the diversified higher education offers of Switzerland. This leads to many practical problems for Europeans when choosing Switzerland as their mobility country as the access is far from unified compared to countries in the Erasmus+ programme and often limited to an interinstitutional approach. The benefits of re-association are mutual and, as much as Swiss students benefit from going to other European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the European Students benefit from experiencing mobility at some of the HEIs offering courses of the highest quality. Additionally, they get to experience an alternative political and democratic system, different approaches to engagement in society and a culturally diversified country with four different national languages.

Erasmus+ is about solidarity, equality and togetherness and each country that participates brings very individual added values to the learner's experience, especially recognized by those who underwent such mobility programmes. One country alone, regardless of its diversity, cannot offer their students the same experiences, both tangible and intangible, as an immersion in the international and European higher education context can. Only if as

⁹ Interview with the Vice-President of the European Commission Maros Sefcovic:
<https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/wir-brauchen-ein-signal-dass-die-schweiz-es-ernst-meint-749949623387>

many countries as possible are brought together in participation and contribution to the Erasmus programme, can we really create equal learning opportunities for all European students, contributing to the building of the European identity. With each participating country, the amount of youth projects grows and more young people can engage in their activities. It is important that these learning opportunities grow in their quantity and their quality and contribute to the inclusiveness, breaking down the barriers to the access to European higher education, and diversifying experiences of the programme. Switzerland, at this point in time, seems to be one of the few missing puzzle pieces in the Erasmus+ scheme, and we believe, one of the crucial ones.

Switzerland and the EU have their differences, which were visible in the talks around the InstA, but we are certain that with greater access to youth exchange projects, contributing to the internationalisation of Switzerland and to the cooperation between people and institutions, a better mutual understanding of Swiss and European values can be achieved. This cooperation can only strengthen the ties between Switzerland, the EU and their respective institutions.

The European Students Union:

- Calls upon the European Union to fully associate willing European non-EU states into the new Erasmus+ programme as soon as possible;
- Calls upon the European Commission to treat any economical agreement, such as the Institutional Agreement (InstA), and the association to Erasmus+ as two separate fields;
- Calls upon the Swiss government to bring forward the bill on the financing of the Erasmus+ programme and to engage in negotiations with the European Commission;
- Further calls upon the European Commission to open the dialogue on the re-association of Switzerland to Erasmus+ with the Swiss government.

Proposed by: VSS-UNES-USU, EC

Seconded by: SFS, fzs, DSF, UDU, ÖH, EÜL, LSS