30 years of Erasmus - States General
The Charter of the Erasmus Generation

FROM
ERASMUS
TO
ERASMUS+
30 YEARS
OF SUCCESS
Summary

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Europe has given a fundamental contribution to the spreading of the values of freedom, democracy and solidarity. Nevertheless, Europe was also the cradle of terrible phenomena of violence and intolerance. Totalitarianism was conceived in this territory and the holocaust was planned and carried out here.

At present, our continent is going through a time of economic, political and civil crisis, causing bewilderment and fear. We are tempted to withdraw into ourselves, isolate and re-establish old physical and cultural frontiers we believed demolished once and for all.

We are faced by a crucial challenge: to grow or regress. To avoid going backwards and to build a stronger Europe we have to restart from the Erasmus generation, the young people who studied without geographical barriers in a climate of trust in the future, and with an attitude of curiosity and friendship towards their European brothers.
This year we celebrate **30 years of Erasmus**, an important anniversary for a programme that allowed more than 4 million young people to study in other European universities.

It’s time to make this generation protagonist of the change and it’s necessary that institutions start to listen to them carefully.

In this view the National Agency Erasmus+ Indire, Erasmus Student Network Italy, garagErasmus, in collaboration with the Department for European policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the European Union promoted The States General of the Erasmus Generation.

We asked the young what kind of future they have in mind for the European Union, inviting them to express their opinion on current issues, such as citizenship, work, social inclusion and globalisation. The **Charter of the Erasmus Generation** was born out of the dialogue among thousands of students.

It is a document of political and cultural value addressed to Italian and European institutional decision-makers.

This original and spontaneous contribution originated from a bottom-up mobilisation started symbolically in Rome – the Eternal City, where the Treaties that started the European unification process were signed 60 years ago – and continued with the handover ceremony to the decision-makers, during the Festival of Europe in Florence, one of the world’s cultural capitals, in the hope that this movement will include all the European countries, involving citizens and institutions.

The National Agency Erasmus+ Indire is proud to have favoured this process of civil participation. We are confident that the Charter of the Erasmus Generation will become a reference point for many young Europeans, giving a significant contribution to the establishment of a European Union with a more solid and shared basis.

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¹ Erasmus: European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, Community Programme created on 15 June 1987.
The Charter of the Erasmus Generation

The States General initiative

by Erasmus Student Network Italy and garagErasmus Foundation

Erasmus Student Network Italy and garagErasmus Foundation together with the National Agency Erasmus+ Indire and with the collaboration of the Department for European policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research wanted to bring together the Erasmus Generation in an Italian Council, with the aim of starting a reflection on the Erasmus Programme and its plus, through a constructive dialogue on the future of the Programme itself and the needs of its beneficiaries.

On 24 February, more than two-hundred Italian students and ex-students, who experienced international mobility, gathered together in Rome, in the Sala della Protomoteca of the Campidoglio, Rome’s City Hall. The participants were selected by their Universities in collaboration with Erasmus Student Network Italy and the garagErasmus Foundation.

The first Italian Council of the Erasmus Generation provided an opportunity for listening, debating, and starting a critical reflection on six themes, which continued on an online platform during the following month.
The themes were:

- Erasmus: global vs. non-global
- Local communities and digital world
- United Europe
- European citizenship
- Erasmus for all
- Study/work mobility

The discussion made it possible to collect **policy suggestions** from the Erasmus generation to be delivered to the policy-makers.

The document shows the clear desire of the students to enhance the Programme with new initiatives, but also to strengthen the less publicised already existing opportunities. Therefore, concrete actions were required concerning the Programme’s communication of its policies.

Erasmus Student Network Italy and garagErasmus Foundation deal respectively with supporting incoming and outgoing students’ mobility, and developing an Erasmus Generation professional network.

We strongly believed in this project and hope that the policy suggestions gathered in this publication will be the starting point for a constant and proactive dialogue with the policy makers. We commit to use them as guidelines in carrying out our activities and our projects.
Globalisation and the global vs. non-global idea recall to many people’s minds the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and the protests against neo-liberalism, but also the multinationals’ power and the free-trade agreements.

There was a dream, a hope and a possibility supporting all this: it was called the European Union. It was the idea of managing globalisation so that it would bring well-being, peace and safety, for all.

We notice some flaws in the management of globalisation, as we imagined it in Europe. Where did it go wrong?

In present days, we see Europe in deep crisis. It is divided and disheartened and builds walls instead of bridges.

Is Europe still a community which can guarantee safety based on a sense of belonging and shared values? Can Europe still contribute to the creation of this community and to a European identity, in a
worldwide dialogue, in which no one feels excluded?

What can we do as people who benefited from a Europe without borders?

These were the themes enlivening the work group “Erasmus: global vs. non-global”. Starting from the actual situation, confiding in the value of our Erasmus experience, we reasoned on how it could be possible to put Europe in contact with its citizens, how to make our societies more aware of what Europe did and is doing for us, and how to promote a globalisation which creates inclusion and general well-being.

The proposals brought up were:

For schools

1 To introduce the compulsory subject of “Education to the European Union” in schools, in order to explain the creation of the EU, its political bodies, its competences, and the advantages that the member states obtained from their EU membership, also by means of simulations or guided tours to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

2 To learn more about the contemporary history of the last 100 years, at least during the last year of second grade secondary school, to be more aware of the reasons that brought to the creation of the European Union, of the dynamics of globalisation, of the causes of the world wars and compare the situation before and after the European Union.

3 To provide students with tools for more aware information, through fact checking and fake news spotting.

4 Proposals 1.2.3. could also be integrated in the civic education lesson, providing that they are given enough attention. Moreover, the lesson in class could be backed up by active citizenship initiatives.

5 To strengthen and sustain community initiatives dedicated to schools, such as eTwinning and the projects Erasmus+ for schools.

6 To celebrate European anniversaries at school.

For adults

7 To promote forms of “Erasmus for enterprises” and best practices observation, to be considered compulsory for those working in public administrations, and suggested for private companies which would benefit from incentives.
The work group “local communities and digital world” agreed to the key principle that technology is useful but not sufficient to boost interpersonal relationships. For this reason, it is necessary to build physical spaces to meet, discuss, train and be informed, in order to balance the “liquidity” of our lives.

The main objective of this panel was to suggest short term, easily achievable solutions, through the implementation of already existing tools and structures.

1 Valorisation and implementation of the Europe Direct centres

Citizens are not often aware of the presence of the Europe Direct centres on the territory. Therefore, it would be advisable to support information and advertising initiatives, in particular addressed to the young, such as meetings in institutes and universities, information brochures, dissemination of news on the social networks and the presence in loco of advisors for the young.
At the same time, Europe Direct centres could start a process of incrementation of their activities and, instead of being limited to documentation and information centres, become places for meeting, dialogue and planning.

2 Creation of meeting places in already existing structures in the local community.

Support the development of other more informal places such as libraries, cultural centres, universities and institutes, where European citizens, especially the young, could make use of various services, such as language, history and IT courses together with conference halls and instrumentation systems etc. These places could become, on the example of business incubators, incubators of ideas, citizenship and historical memory. The coordination of these centres could be carried out by a representative/office of the House of European History. This would activate a productive debate between European institutions and local communities.

3 Use of technologies to promote online activities and initiatives

Creation of an instrument for professional mobility, working in parallel with the EURES Portal, where all the Europe Direct centres’ initiatives could converge.

At the same time, a wider news section could be created to gather useful information for university students, such as scholarships, calls for international mobility, calls for paper, etc. All these activities should be accompanied by information sheets, newsletters and social networks.
The 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties in 1957 was a historical event to be celebrated but also enriched with new ideas and contents. The event represented an essential opportunity to look closely at the critical issues of the popularity of the European project and all the opportunities for its possible relaunch.

This was done by the member states’ governments reunited for the historical day, the 25 March and at the same time the young selected by all the Italian universities, who are going to live and perhaps lead tomorrow’s Europe.

In an internal survey of the group “United Europe”, carried out at the beginning of the works to bring out the priority themes of tomorrow’s Europe, the participating students pointed out, without hesitation, the objective to guarantee to all Europeans opportunities for cultural growth and exchange.

The result was not to be taken for granted and the debate was passionate, even heated sometimes, and laid down some action proposals.
The priority was identified in the necessity of guaranteeing respect and daily application of democracy and human rights in the European continent and ensure the global competitiveness of the European economy.

Students affirmed that union among cultures and people comes first and set the bases of political and economic integration.

The main action proposals that emerged from the discussion are summarised below:

**Guaranteeing opportunities for growth and cultural exchange to all European citizens**

1. The integration of some of the most successful informal experiences among young Europeans, such as the couch-surfing model, was proposed to enlarge the number of beneficiaries of the Erasmus experience. The international mobility experience would continue to be integrated in a renewed institutional context.

2. Setting up a network of families willing to host and assist the students, especially in the first two weeks from the arrival in the city or country of destination. This was proposed in order to activate informal networks to support the Programme, to allow low-costs, and therefore more participation to the Erasmus experience.

3. Consolidating pre-Erasmus training courses (cf. Erasmus in School di ESN, the Welcome Days held in universities, squares, municipalities etc.) in secondary schools and universities were proposed to spread the knowledge and the attractiveness of the Programme. In these contexts, the informal involvement of foreign students, belonging to a mobility programme, stimulate a genuine desire to live the same experience by connecting and arising curiosity among peers. It would be desirable to create specifically trained professional figures, visiting universities to teach cultural difference (the subject could be named “the beauty of differences”). These courses should be open also to the students who are not going to participate to the exchange Programme.

4. “Erasmus professorial tenures” could be established in the main European universities and academies. Students might propose lessons and periodical seminars on subjects of their choice, approved by the university, to stimulate other students’ interest on European and extra European cultures.

5. The creation of a European student card is of capital importance to reinforce the principle of European citizenship. This card should be effectively recognised all over Europe and promote common rights and duties in all member states (cf. E-card project).

6. Encourage free-access to all public museums for under 26 and over 65 European people, in order to decrease dis-equality in accessing culture.
 Guaranteeing respect and daily application of democracy and human rights in the European continent

1. The creation of mechanisms/structures constantly monitoring the protection of the human rights should be encouraged, as recognised by the European and international conventions. This might result, in the medium term, in the creation of a European Ministry, exercising sanctioning power, in case of non-compliance within the member states.

2. In the short term, a widespread dissemination of the method of decision by an absolute majority in the Council should be promoted on themes related to the respect of democracy standards and human rights, as provided for in the European Treaties, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Ensuring the competitiveness of the European economy in global competition

1. An organic revision of the Stability and Growth Pact is proposed to give governments more room for manoeuvre to restore virtuous cycles of economic growth.

2. Pushing forward a more consistent harmonization of direct and indirect taxation systems, including the Value Added Tax (VAT), and the creation of a quality brand, “Made in EU” for exportation products.

3. Finally, should be taken into consideration the idea of allowing the European Central Bank to activate direct lending to citizens and businesses, without the necessary intermediation of lenders, in order to facilitate virtuous credit circulation.
In this time of rejection of “the other”, fear and walls instead of bridges, what does being a European citizen mean? In the Panel, the ultimate meaning of European Citizenship was investigated, beyond its legal framework, to reimagine Europe as a community of active citizens and promote the fundamental principles of humanity, solidarity and peace within the European union. A community which dialogues with its citizens by means of local activities and emphasises the positive effects of being European, which have been taken for granted by many people in Italy.

Towards active citizenship based on the principles of humanity, solidarity and peace

In order to rethink Europe as a community of active citizens, it is necessary to restart from the meaning of European citizenship, recovering the fundamental principles of humanity, solidarity and peace of the European Union.
European citizenship today: from principles to practice

European citizenship is formally recognised in the Maastricht treaty (1992). In the EU Charter of Fundamental Right (2007) all people are guaranteed civil rights (dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity and justice) and EU citizens are reserved political rights. This concept is laid down by law but in practice it is still not part of the life of Italian people as European citizens.

Practical actions towards a stronger “feeling of being European” for an active citizenship.

European citizenship, in a systematic approach (from a legal and social point of view) concerns the creation of a sense of belonging not only local but also European. How to create an active European citizenship in our social fabric? There are three areas of intervention:

Education to European citizenship in schools

1 (Re)introduction of Education to European citizenship in schools.
2 Organisation of mini-contests for students’ associations.
3 Strengthening of the already successful programmes in the education system (e.g. Erasmus in Schools, which connects Erasmus students with secondary school students).

Active citizenship awareness campaigns towards the “feeling of being European”

4 Organisation of events for the “hard to reach” young and not so young, with the collaboration of local associations
5 Cultural and music events: multicultural lunches, integrated projects (theatre shows, exhibitions, concerts) implementing the concept of “thinking along European lines”.
6 Meetings with “champion” citizens who migrated to another European state and contributed to its economy, research and culture.

Media

Media support in proposing positive models of “European thinking” is essential. Negative storytelling on Europe limits the potential of experiencing European citizenship. How to offset “media terrorism” that affects the population, makes it distrustful, frightened of others and increasingly ready to build barriers?

Balancing should be done with positive examples from those who experienced “feeling European” as Erasmus students at university, or in a EVS (European Voluntary Service), as a worker and as a citizen.

Videos and programmes, with the collaboration of creative young people, can tell about Europe’s founding fathers, the Europe advocating humanity, solidarity, peace and sharing, refuting the clichés. Support could come from identifying contact points between the Creative Europe Program (subprogramme Media) and the Erasmus+ Program.
Collaboration of the Erasmus students for a change of course

The exchange of ideas revealed in the Erasmus Generation the desire to be part of a change of society towards greater awareness of European citizenship, not only at the legal level, but in a wider sense, as a community. This is possible only through targeted actions of bottom-up involvement. It is necessary to communicate and share the feeling of being a European citizen as part of a welcoming community able to value differences. European citizenship is not only a legal concept but, has (as it had for the founding fathers) a much wider meaning that embraces our differences as citizens, sharing humanity, solidarity and peace as our goals.
Thirty years from its beginning, the Erasmus Program has largely demonstrated its effectiveness and success. Nevertheless, still persist some critical issues, limiting greater participation. These are mainly due to economic, social and cultural reasons. The road to a complete “Erasmus for All” is in fact still a long one, but it is a specific mandate of the Parliament and of the Council to “ensure that particular efforts are made to promote social inclusion and participation of subjects with specific needs or minor opportunities in the Erasmus+ Programme”².

From the reflection of the participants to the Erasmus for All working group, two priorities clearly emerged to improve the existing mobility policies.

Measures in favour of economically disadvantaged people

Although the size of the economic contribution varies greatly from country to country, often the smallness of these contributions hinders the mobility of people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In order to make the participation in Erasmus+ more democratic and inclusive, the following proposals emerged:

1. Study mobility combined with paid internships or part-time work: allow students to do an internship or part-time work integrated and recognized in the course of study during a period of mobility abroad. This would allow for a further source of livelihood that will accompany the scholarship. Universities would be called upon to strengthen agreements with companies and institutions in order to guarantee the maximum effectiveness of these types of complementary scholarships.

2. Mobility for short-term projects: fully funded on the Erasmus+ Intensive Program model but with a share of participants devoted to projects of short duration.

3. Private sponsorships of additional scholarships dedicated to students from economically disadvantaged social and/or family contexts.

Measures in favour of people with disabilities

The Participation in Erasmus+ of students with special needs is not only a concrete and holistic action on the institutional front, but there is a need for concrete programmes such as ESN’s MappED. However, there are still a number of fully accessible universities.

Critical issues are for example:

1. A small number of fully accessible universities for the disabled, causing a restriction of the possibilities for outgoing students.

2. Absence of a comprehensive mapping of accessible structures for students.

3. The lack of support for the students during the mobility phase of the project.

The Bologna Process is in fact a fundamental principle of the achievement of a student body that reflects the composition of the general population is in fact a fundamental principle of the general population.
The “Mobility between study and work” panel emphasised the need for Community Programs, but also their revision so that they can better prepare students to become part of the workplace in a gradual and systematic manner already during studies and experiences of mobility.

1. It is necessary to review university curricula. During the course of the studies it is important to provide students with practical skills along with the theory.

It is suggested, for example, to teach students to have English presentations on specific topics, prepare computer presentations with appropriate software, perform exercises that demonstrate synthesis skills, work in groups to understand how to best develop relational skills, carry out public speaking activities etc.

It is at least desirable to invest more in the opportunity offered by the Erasmus+ Program to invite guest lecturers from the
international world of work to present their professional experience directly in the classrooms.

2. Links between exchange students and enterprises, active in the territory, should be fostered and supported through Erasmus+. This might result in hybrid mobility for study and traineeship. To this end, it would be useful to develop guidelines and strengthen digital support tools for the students searching for hosting companies, or during their internship, such as erasmusintern.org.

3. During the study period abroad, all students should be encouraged to include modules of knowledge and promotion of European citizenship in the course of their study. It is crucial that students returned to their country share the international mobility they had experienced with their learning structure. This principle is envisaged by the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) a document, awarded at Community level following the application of a higher education institution, which sets out the virtuous behaviours to be adopted at all stages of international mobility - that is, before, during and after it takes place - in order to ensure a quality experience.

4. The role of the Erasmus Ambassador could be created through the recognition of training credits and other incentives in the incoming universities, including specific training courses. The Erasmus Ambassador, besides facilitating a closer approach to the hosting culture and society, could favour and disseminate more quickly the sense of European citizenship. In order to do this, it is advisable to pursue structured collaboration with Erasmus Student Network.

5. The first post-graduate months should be used to transform the learning experience abroad into a stable working condition. It is necessary to disseminate the European Quality Charter for Internships, and it is crucial to value extra-curricular skills acquired abroad and to provide incentives for enterprises and participants for a quick recruitment.

6. It is important to engage professional associations and encourage the entry of students who had an experience abroad, through a credit system. Business networks could be established, involving especially small and medium-sized enterprises in an ethics-based and user-centred insertion program focused on the participant’s growth, such as the European Voluntary Service charter (EVS). Additionally, new recruitment could be promoted by involving in the Programme businesses wanting to hire students at the end of the training period.
Conclusions

By Erasmus Student Network Italia and the garagErasmus Foundation

The States General of the Erasmus Generation, the First Italian Council, were the first opportunity to identify the Erasmus Generation perception of key issues that involve not only the young who have experienced international mobility, but the entire European citizenship.

The different work groups, participated actively to develop their ideas and proposals regarding the issues covered. In particular, it is interesting to note that on more than one occasion, shared views emerged spontaneously. In some cases, policies have been proposed which have been already started by the Institutions, and it would be interesting to consider how to modify or implement them, while in other cases new proposals have emerged that can be taken into account for different contexts.

We list below the most common issues brought up by the different working groups during the online discussion:

• The importance of using bottom-up policies stresses the need to involve citizens at local level and to give them the space to develop projects, carry out debates and organise cultural events, thereby creating a virtuous circle that generates
positive impetus at European level (*Local communities and the digital world*);

- The importance of education to **European citizenship** and the **history of the Union**, to be taught in schools as an integral part of civic education, a subject too often sadly neglected, which should be readapted and made compulsory (*Erasmus: global vs. non-global*). The same is hoped for in universities (*Mobility between study and work*);

- The need to discourage the recruitment of unpaid **trainees** and, on the contrary, to guarantee trainees a minimum wage (*Mobility between study and work; Erasmus for All*);

- Increasing involvement of the Erasmus generation in **building policies** aimed at promoting European citizenship (*European Citizenship; Mobility between study and work; United Europe*);

- The **implementation of various types of European-level exchange programmes**, including not only universities but also compulsory school education, the public administration and involving families and businesses (*Erasmus: global vs. non-global*);

- The creation of the **agencies** necessary to carry out some of the proposals and the implementation of already existing ones. (*Mobility between study and work, united Europe, local communities and the digital world*);

- The need for **economic measures** to make citizens trust again the European institutions (*United Europe*).

With the hope that these thoughts can be considered to reinforce or modify existing mobility policies, Erasmus Student Network Italy and the garagErasmus Foundation intend to thank the two hundred young people and their group moderators for their work. This precious document reflects the thoughts and needs of the Erasmus Generation and we are proud of having contributed to the improvement of the Programme.
From left: Federico Taddia, Francesco Cappè, Giovanni Biondi, Andrea Mazzillo, Evarist Bartolo, Valeria Fedeli, Sandro Gozi, Ian Borg, Silvia Costa, Martine Reicherts.
General States of the Erasmus Generation, First Italian Council.