

Motion

Application to associate willing non-EU European countries with Erasmus+

signed by: Swiss National Youth Council (CSAJ/SAJV)

co-signed by: British Youth Council (BYC), European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), Erasmus Student Network International (ESN), European Students' Union (ESU), Flemish Youth Council (VJR), Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), World Organisation of the Scout Movement (WOSM)

co-signed by Swiss youth organisations: ESN Switzerland, Intermundo Switzerland, Verband der Schweizer Studierendenschaften (VSS | UNES | USU)

Erasmus+ enables young people, students, professionals, and volunteers alike to benefit from fruitful exchange activities which allow for a better cultural understanding, increased knowledge transfer, and crucial formal and non-formal educational experiences benefiting the whole of Europe. As youth organisations, we highly appreciate the Erasmus+ programme, which allows us to **engage** in meaningful exchange activities, learn from each other, **connect** and create a bond beyond national borders. The programme strengthens our European identity and rallies young people around our shared values by the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It enables young leaders from volunteer-based organisations to become responsible, active, and **empowered** citizens of Europe. It promotes citizenship and helps enhance participation in democratic life within European societies. The learning mobility experiences also contribute to the personal and educational development of volunteers, students, apprentices, and young adults.

The association to the Erasmus+ programme of a willing¹ non-EU European country with our shared values by the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law represents an extension of opportunities for young Europeans. To give an example, this would be the case of the re-association of Switzerland to the Erasmus+ programme. While Swiss young people would benefit from the increased possibility of a European exchange, other European young people would also benefit from Switzerland's re-association to the Erasmus+ programme. Swiss institutions offer diverse learning and cultural experiences for the European youth. Presently, the lack of a unified structure of access to these institutions impairs all European young people. Switzerland has many institutions committed and motivated to create new partnerships. However, a broader framework to allow the smooth cooperation between institutions is vital for all participants. Currently, the absence of Switzerland in the Erasmus+ programme represents a lose-lose situation for both European Union (EU) youth and Swiss youth. Since 2014, different Swiss youth organisations have been active in amplifying youth voices and promoting a re-association to

the Erasmus+ programme. Switzerland's absence from the programme has had a negative impact on the equal opportunities of young people in Switzerland compared to their EU peers. To give an example, figures show that between 2014 and 2020, Austria, an EU-country of comparable population, participated 11 times more in projects than Switzerland did.²

Negotiations on (future) cooperation between the EU and Switzerland have been influencing the negotiations on Switzerland's re-association to the Erasmus+ programme for years. CSAJ/SAJV uses this example of the situation in Switzerland to emphasise that education issues should not be used as a tool of political pressure and that the interests of European youth should be represented adequately. In this sense, the specific Swiss concern is also of interest to the European Youth Forum. For fundamental interests, it is untenable to put the education of young European adults at risk and to use this as a means of political pressure. CSAJ/SAJV assumes that other willing non-EU European countries with the above-mentioned values face comparable situations. The more of these European countries are associated to the Erasmus+ programme, the higher could be the chance that the whole European youth becomes active citizens of the European society. **Moreover, a wide variety of opportunities of educational and cultural experiences is what this youth deserves.**

The stagnation around the political negotiations between the EU and Switzerland has given a whole new dimension to the problem, which is one of the reasons why the CSAJ/SAJV wants to bring the issue to the table again after the European Youth Forum already approved a similar motion in November 2020.³ With this motion, CSAJ/SAJV aims to remind both discussion partners, the EU as well as the Swiss government, that education issues should not be toyed with. The discussion about the re-association of Switzerland to the Erasmus+ programme should take place independently from the rest of the negotiations and as soon as possible. Speaking on the European level, requiring that nego-

1 "Willing" is understood here in the context that the country is willing to join the Erasmus+ programme, not that the country is willing to be non-EU.

2 Movetia (2023): Erasmus+ cooperation: Switzerland is lagging behind!. Online: <https://www.movetia.ch/en/news-events/erasmus-cooperation-switzerland-is-lagging-behind> [last access: 16.02.2023].

3 Motion of CSAJ/SAJV "Motion on Erasmus+ Successor Programme - Association of all European Countries" from November 2020.

tiations to join the Erasmus+ programme take place independently of other political negotiations would facilitate other willing non-EU European countries the access to the Erasmus+ programme.

The Erasmus+ programme should promote the development of projects and exchanges between all youth in Europe. Additionally, the aforementioned principles provide support for the inclusion of willing non-EU European countries into the European Solidarity Corps programme. The European Solidarity Corps enables the engagement of young people in solidary activities and contributes to projects that benefit communities across Europe.

Taking this into consideration, CSAJ/SAJV calls on the responsible actors to:

- Support the re-association of Switzerland into the Erasmus+ programme;
- Ensure that all willing non-EU European countries that abide by the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are granted access to the Erasmus+ programme;
- Support working towards the accession of all willing non-EU European countries that abide by the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law into the European Solidarity Corps programme;
- Urge political actors to not use educational issues as a means of political pressure.

The CSAJ/SAJV hopes for the support of the European Youth Forum by having their member organisations sign this motion. In this sense, it is possible to send a strong signal on a continental level that education and youth interests should not be misused as a means of political pressure.



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