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Educating to internationalism: the birth of an idea

Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of current European Union who was called to build a new international reality starting from the ashes of the Second World War, said: **"If I were to start again, I would start with education"**.

It is during the immediate postwar period that the comprehension of the relevance of **educating youths to internationalism** is rooted, so that they can **become better citizens of single Nations, Europe and the whole world**.

The topic of **education** was **not explicitly included in the Treaties of Rome**.

During this **first phase (1950s-1960s)**, **single States and universities** were the **only promoters of the international university cooperation**, implementing national laws and rules or drawing up agreements to allow the execution and the recognition of the studies abroad.

In the **1970s** there was a **first, informal admission of educations' themes inside the competences of the European Community** (see the *Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of education, meeting within the Council of 9 February 1976*, which sets the first European action programme in the field of education).

Erasmus: the turning point

The real turning point was the **Council decision of 15th June 1987**.

it was adopted the **European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students**, aiming to achieve a significant increase in the number of **university students spending an integrated period of study in another Member State**, thus consolidating the concept of a People's Europe.

Erasmus: legal framework and evolution

The **Articles 128 and 235 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community** were recalled as legal basis for this new Programme.

- These norms did not directly concerned education.

Only through the **Treaty of Maastricht (art. 126, today art. 165 TFUE)** the **topic of education finally found its place in the fundamental Community laws**.

- The **Member States** have the responsibility for the content of **teaching and the organization of education systems**, while the **Union** should play a **role of support**, supplement and coordination;
- **Union action** shall be aimed at **encouraging mobility of students and teachers**, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study abroad.

After almost **30 years** from its birth, the Erasmus Programme has allowed **more than 3 million of students** to cross national borders. Anyway, Erasmus has not only a didactic purpose, **making the exchange of people also an exchange of knowledge**.

The Programme's success has also led to **several achievements**: the launch of the **Bologna Process** in 1999, the establishment of the **European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS)**, the **internationalization of higher education institutions**.

Meanwhile the **Programme has evolved**, becoming a **piece of wider programmes**: during the 1990s, it became part of **Socrates Programme**; in 2007 it merged into the **Lifelong Learning Programme**.

Last step was the creation of **Erasmus + Programme** by the **Regulation EU n. 1288/2013**.

Main goals: enhancing the quality of European higher education; promoting understanding between people; contributing to the sustainable development of higher education and to socio-economic development; stimulating "brain circulation".

Mobility does not involve only university students, but **also university staff and professors, students of all levels of school, entrepreneurs, athletes** etc.

Internationalization and public law: the role of the Universities...

Public law played a **primary role** in this path toward internationalization and integration of foreigners.

Universities – a type of public administrations – are the **first social structure the foreign student gets in contact with**.

Every university which want to enter in the Erasmus circuit **must**:

- ensure a **cost-free attendance to the courses** for foreign students (they pay taxes only to home countries universities) and the **recognition exams attended** by their own students in the European universities they have an agreement with;
- **give all the information** needed for joining the Erasmus Programme;
- **help students** in administrative duties;
- **organize the reception and the integration** of foreign students, to whom also offer the opportunity to enhance their knowledge in the local language.

All these duties are described in detail in the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)**, an act released to the Universities by the Commission, and they are reiterated in each **Learning Agreement**, meaning every agreement concluded by two universities in relation to every single student doing the exchange.

...and the role of the other public administration

Meanwhile the **implementation of the Programme** on the **Union level belongs to the Commission**, on a **State level** it falls among the competences of specific **National Agencies**, supervised by **Nationals Authorities**.

National Agencies tasks consist in managing specific actions of the Programme, as the one relating to learning mobility of individuals (typical assignments are: **funds supply, advice and assistance to University** and other institutions applying for the Erasmus Programme...).

Integration and public law

In order to facilitate integration and internationalization, the **States** take all appropriate measures to **remove legal and administrative obstacles** to the proper functioning of the Erasmus.

Among the several measures taken by the States, we can recall: the **recognition of the right to access to the same services the local students** can access; the **possibility to supply grants** in addition to the European ones; the recognition of **different kinds of benefits**, as reductions on public transportations or access to specific international students residences.

Are those tools effective for a full integration in the hosting community?

According to several social researches, although studying abroad led to increased socializing with other Europeans ("Erasmus community"), **contact with hosting community might remain limited**.

Beyond the effectiveness of the tools crafted by public law, this reflects the **nature of particular society of the University**, a community with a common vision and a sense of belonging, in which Erasmus students are firstly integrated.

Is the lack of a full integration in the hosting community a clue of **Erasmus programme failure** and failure of public law tools adopted in order to realize it?

No, if the main goal of Erasmus is still "consolidating the concept of a People's Europe". **Cross-border interaction promotes collective identity** (at least inside the Erasmus community), connects different populations and reduces national distances.

In conclusion, we must recognize that Erasmus Programme, as made possible through public law tools, is a first concrete attempt of **transcultural education**, in order to help the **"foreigner" to lose his negative meaning** as "stranger or enemy", both for the hosting community and, mainly, for the whole "community" participating to the Programme.