



**European Committee
of the Regions**

CIVEX-VI/024

127th plenary session, 31 January–1 February 2018

OPINION

Erasmus for local and regional representatives

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- points out that European institutions are still considered to be remote or technocratic and that European citizens do not always see the benefits of key European decisions in their daily lives;
- considers the local and regional authorities to be an essential link between Europe and its people; developing their knowledge and skills in the field of European policy, and building contacts with elected representatives in other countries, are key elements in developing human capital and meeting European integration objectives;
- takes the view that part of the responsibility for training local and regional elected representatives to provide them with a better knowledge of the spirit of European integration, as well as European policies, lies with the European institutions and that European bodies cannot ignore this call from local and regional elected representatives, particularly in relation to the European elections;
- reiterates its support – outlined in its 2009 *White Paper on Multilevel Governance* – for the creation of an "Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives", its desire to work with the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on outlining the conceptual and operational design of the programme, and its support for establishing training programmes and exchanges of good practices targeted at local and regional elected representatives;
- stresses the mobility aspect, which must be retained as the effectiveness of knowledge transfer through peer-learning is well documented by research;
- calls for a working group made up of representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions to be established quickly to develop and prepare this programme.

Rapporteur:

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Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Erasmus for local and regional representatives

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Introduction and background

1. is fully involved in the debate launched by the European Commission in the *White Paper on the future of Europe - Reflections and scenarios for the EU* and has taken note of the proposals made by President Juncker during the State of Union debate in September 2017;
2. points out the European institutions are still considered to be remote or technocratic and that European citizens do not always see the benefits of key European decisions in their daily lives;
3. points out that, at European level, local elected representatives generally enjoy considerably higher levels of trust from their fellow citizens than the majority of national politicians;
4. notes that in light of the current geopolitical crises, the increased risk from terrorism and the Brexit negotiations, European citizens feel that it is more and more appropriate to take public action at European level to address our common challenges;
5. underlines that the key challenge is to foster not just technical knowledge about the EU and its institutions, but also an open mind-set in favour of cooperation and exchange within the European integration context, which is based on the values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and the principle of solidarity; this European spirit is the key ingredient to make European integration function as a means to preserve peace and build a sustainable and just future for all;
6. notes the success of the Erasmus+, programme, a shining example of European policy that will celebrate its 30th birthday in 2017. This programme has enabled more than 5 million Europeans to spend a period abroad, broadening and extending its target groups to include: students, college students, secondary school pupils, apprentices, teachers and trainers, young graduates, job seekers and volunteers and professionals from the voluntary sector and the sporting world;
7. welcomes the launch, on the initiative of the European Parliament, of the Erasmus for apprentices scheme;
8. recognises that technologies and lifestyles are evolving rapidly and that responses by public authorities must better take account of the human dimension of this development;
9. points out that local and regional authorities in Europe are facing challenges (the economic and financial crisis, climate change, demographic change and environmental problems, etc.) that require integrated measures and strategies;

10. highlights that multi-level governance, local self-government and decentralisation reforms emphasise the role that local and regional authorities play in implementing European policies and that it is crucial to assist them in developing expertise and skills in these areas;
11. insists that all those involved in implementing integrated development policies should be able to acquire the generic and multi-disciplinary skills and knowledge needed to enable the development of local and regional authorities;
12. notes that, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, in most Member States the local and regional authorities are directly responsible for designing public services and making them available. They also aim to ensure that these services they are performing effectively, while taking into account the opportunities offered by European public policies;

The European Union must develop new innovative tools to deal with current and future challenges

13. regrets the fact that, at a time when the EU is going through a period of major upheaval, the constraints of the Multiannual Financial Framework do not always allow the EU to be able to respond effectively to new crises or new challenges;
14. calls on the Parliament, the Council and the European Commission to propose measures to ensure that the Multiannual Financial Framework is more in tune with the major challenges of our time, in order to respond quickly to new concerns;
15. stresses the fact that that cross-border and interregional exchanges can strengthen links between different European, national and regional programmes and instruments that aim to boost innovation, growth and jobs;
16. acknowledges that EU responses are currently determined by rules that are unable to adapt to general changes and to specific situations and that is why the European Commission, particularly with its White Paper on the Future of Europe, proposes to move European strategies, policies and measures forward;
17. calls on the European Commission to take greater account of human capital in preparing the future multiannual framework, in order to better meet the needs of citizens and the challenges of this century;
18. calls on the next presidencies of the Council of the European Union to also better factor in human capital when outlining their programme;

The situation for local and regional elected representatives in this context

19. considers the 91 000 local and regional authorities, and therefore hundreds of thousands of elected representatives in the European Union, to be an essential link between Europe and its people. Developing their knowledge and skills in the field of European policy, and building contacts with elected representatives in different Member States (Programme Countries) and

Non EU Programme Countries¹, are key elements in developing human capital and meeting European integration objectives;

20. notes that local and regional elected representatives have not always received all the training required to perform their duties prior their election and that continuous training activities are a useful aid in supporting local and regional elected representatives in carrying out their role effectively; stresses that this training does not just consist of providing them with the appropriate technical knowledge, but should also allow them to understand the reasons for, and the spirit of, European integration in order to show to their voters why and how the European project can be of benefit for them;
21. considers the decisions taken by local and regional elected representatives to be closely linked to European legislation when:
 - a. regions with legislative powers participate in the European decision-making process, attending working groups of the Council and Councils of Ministers open to regional participation;
 - b. they take part in European decision-making during the consultation phase, responding to the various public consultations carried out by the European Commission;
 - c. reports are drawn up by the Committee of the Regions in the areas of competence provided for in the Treaties;
 - d. they are applying European directives and regulations in a wide variety of fields (water, waste, mobility, energy, etc.);
 - e. they are applying for European funding (ERDF, ESF, etc.);
 - f. they are planning State aid;
 - g. they are cooperating with local authorities in different Member States;

Establishing an Erasmus for local and regional elected representatives

22. believes that the lessons learned from evaluating the preparatory action, the use of the Local Administration Facility (LAF) and exchange programmes between peers provide a source of information that can be used to improve the learning and exchange experience;
23. recommends that the exchange of good practices between local and regional authorities be encouraged, particularly as regards the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the Horizon 2020 programme, cohesion policy and combinations of these programmes; this underlines the that the Erasmus for local and regional elected representatives could be used to assist the less economically developed regions in increasing their administrative capacities;
24. asks the European Commission to give greater consideration to the need to inform, assist and train local and regional elected representatives in the EU on making effective use of European funds and on interregional cooperation at European level;

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-a/who-can-participate/eligible-countries_en.

25. calls on the European Commission to consult or take account of new initiatives proposed by groups of local and regional authorities, with the aim of improving current EU policies or launching new European initiatives;
26. takes the view that part of the responsibility for training local and regional elected representatives to provide them with a better knowledge of the spirit of European integration as well as European policies lies with the European institutions and that European bodies cannot ignore this call from local and regional elected representatives, particularly in relation to the European elections;
27. reiterates its support – outlined in its 2009 *White Paper on Multilevel Governance* – for the creation of an "Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives", its desire to work with the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on outlining the conceptual and operational design of the programme, and its support for establishing training programmes and exchanges of good practices targeted at local and regional elected representatives;
28. recalls that a pilot project was set up in 2012/2013 and has been a resounding success with more than 1 000 applications received for 100 available places;
29. takes the view that this pilot project could serve as a basis for developing a programme that puts greater emphasis on providing training to improve knowledge of the European institutions and the functioning of the European Union by making use of practical case studies and exchanges with other local elected representatives and thus help individual local and regional representatives to experience first-hand the spirit of European cooperation in order to share this experience with their own citizens. Online training tools could also be developed with the aim of better preparing the mobility measures planned under the programme;
30. stresses the mobility aspect, which absolutely must be retained as the effectiveness of knowledge transfer through peer-learning is well documented by research. These multilateral exchanges between local elected representatives offer real European added value when compared with bilateral cooperation;
31. believes that this training programme could also utilise – albeit not exclusively – the European network of universities and "grande écoles" in order to provide training for elected representatives, along with places which hold an important place in the European psyche and which have helped shape the culture and soul of Europe;
32. hopes that at the end of this basic training local and regional elected representatives will be able to cooperate with elected representatives working on the same topics in different Member States in order to:
 - a. exchange good practices,
 - b. improve their knowledge of European legislation,
 - c. create constructive links between people,
 - d. launch new local and regional initiatives;

- e. become more effective ambassadors of the benefits of cooperation with people from other countries, thus building a European spirit;
33. believes that this tool would also serve to strengthen the European spirit of local and regional leaders and would encourage the emergence of a European awareness among local and regional governments;
 34. believes that these measures should be tested and improved in accordance with lessons learned from the pilot project, during the course of 2018, 2019 and 2020, with a view to subsequently including them in the European Commission's new legislative planning, on a different legal basis should this be necessary in order to create an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives or local and regional actors;
 35. emphasises that the programme should be designed so that full-time and part-time politicians, as well as those who occupy managerial posts of a more technical nature, can take part, and that care should be taken to strike a good balance between women and men and geographically, guaranteeing the involvement of representatives of local and regional authorities of all scales and population sizes;
 36. calls on the Commission to propose one or more experimental approaches with a strong leverage effect, by learning lessons from the 2012 pilot project in order to improve the new programme, thereby enhancing the knowledge and experience of local elected representatives on the European Union and its policies;
 37. takes the view that the costs can be shared by EU budgets, the respective local authorities of the elected representatives taking part and, if need be, training bodies receiving public funds in some Member States;
 38. calls on Member States to support this initiative, which will benefit their citizens by providing a better knowledge of policies, the day-to-day life of local authorities in other Member States and European funds and their practical implementation as well as contributing to stability and mutual trust among Member States;
 39. proposes that the European Parliament should support the Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives – as it did in 2012 – through various measures (reports, conferences, etc.) and particularly by proposing to include a pilot project in the budgetary procedure 2018, to be implemented in 2019;
 40. emphasises that it will only be possible to create an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives by allocating additional financial resources, without in any way penalising the budget of the Erasmus+ programme;
 41. will become fully involved in establishing this programme by helping to compile the applications of the representatives taking part, disseminating the call for interest, holding a module during the European week of Regions and Cities and by helping to develop one or more of the online training modules;

42. calls for a working group made up of representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions to be established quickly to develop and prepare this programme.

Brussels, 31 January 2018

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Erasmus for local and regional representatives
References	
Legal basis	
Procedural basis	Rule 41(b)(ii) of the Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	N/A
Date of Bureau decision	7 February 2017
Commission responsible	CIVEX
Rapporteur	François DECOSTER (FR/ALDE)
Analysis	2 March 2017
Discussion in commission	21 September 2017
Date adopted by commission	21 September 2017
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Adopted by majority vote
Date adopted in plenary	31 January 2018
Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	N/A