

**EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE EFTA STATES**

4/TD/W/015  
5 June 2003  
Brussels

**WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH**

**Comments by the EEA EFTA States on the Commission's proposal for a  
Community programme in the field of education -  
Erasmus Mundus 2004 - 2008**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The EEA EFTA States participate in a number of Community programmes and activities in the field of education, training and youth under the auspices of the EEA Agreement. The Commission has presented a proposal for a new programme, ERASMUS MUNDUS, for co-operation with third countries in the area of higher education. Participation by the EEA EFTA States is foreseen in the proposal, and the EEA EFTA States would like this programme to be included in the EEA Agreement.

2. This document presents the comments of the EEA EFTA States on the Commission's proposal. The comments have been elaborated by the EFTA Working Group on Education, Training and Youth.

**GENERAL REMARKS**

3. International co-operation in higher education has increased in recent years, and the Community programmes in the field of education and training have been motors in this development. The creation of a European area for higher education and research and the globalisation of higher education, have made it important to facilitate the access of students from third countries to higher education in Europe.

4. Against the background of the development of reforms (including the Bologna Process) and generally the need to improve the attractiveness of European higher education, ERASMUS MUNDUS is a natural development. The EEA EFTA States consider this proposal for co-operation with third countries an appropriate measure in order to meet the challenges and opportunities in higher education.

5. Apart from the Bologna Process, the other major development in European education today is derived from the Lisbon Strategy via the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme on the Follow Up of the Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe. The proposed ERASMUS MUNDUS will be a tool for reaching some of the future objectives for higher education.

6. Another important issue is to strengthen the ties between higher education and research. ERASMUS MUNDUS will through close co-operation between institutions in Europe and third countries contribute to this goal.

7. European co-operation is seeking to establish closer contacts between higher education institutions both within Europe and with third countries. The idea is to develop European Masters courses of high standard, in which several European institutions are involved. This focus on Masters courses is a follow-up of the Bologna Process and is also related to other reforms in higher education in Europe. Co-operation in this area will hopefully lead to concerted efforts in order to develop common curricula and joint programmes.

8. Furthermore, ERASMUS MUNDUS enhances co-operation and mobility among teaching staff. This is a crucial element in the development of closer links with new partners in third countries.

### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

9. It is vital for the success of ERASMUS MUNDUS that European Masters courses be of a high quality, and that the procedures to recognise Masters courses are in accordance with national procedures for the recognition of such courses. Granting a supranational body the right to recognise new Masters degrees should be avoided.

10. The role of the proposed advisory Committee to the Commission on the development of ERASMUS MUNDUS must be clarified.

11. It is important to draw attention to the possibility of underestimation of initial costs for the sake of realistic planning and co-funding issues. The estimated initial costs to establish new Masters courses and to develop the current 11 recognised European Masters courses are, in our opinion, too low considering the required workload for preparing such courses. The proposed level of funding should therefore be higher. An eventual increase would, however, have to be decided on with a view to avoiding a too high reduction in the number of scholarships.

12. The selection of students from third countries to join the programme needs to take into account the diversity of the countries, institutions and fields of study. As suggested in the proposal, the selection of the Masters courses is to be done centrally. The EEA EFTA States recommend that the centralised selection approach be limited to that task. The competent bodies, i.e., the institutions hosting the Masters courses, are to select the students and scholars but they should also be responsible for the distribution of the scholarships. This would be the same kind of approach as with the host-driven Marie Curie actions within the 6FP and would, for example, serve to create synergies between the two programmes.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

14. ERASMUS MUNDUS is an interesting and relevant initiative, responding to the challenges of higher education in Europe. The EEA EFTA States are looking forward to joining the programme and hope that their institutions can contribute positively to the endeavour of making Europe the most attractive region for higher education in the world.