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Policy Brief on

East-West Relationships

Increasing unity through education, youth, research & innovation

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STUDENT FORUM MAASTRICHT

Student Forum Maastricht (SFM) is an annual student conference held at the Maastricht University Campus in Brussels. The conference is organised by students from Maastricht University in cooperation with different partner organisations. The participants are undergraduate and postgraduate students from across Europe with diverse academic backgrounds. Based on problem statements provided by the European Commission representatives, they develop policy briefs for pressing topics within the Commission. In this process the students receive input and insights from experts from NGOs, academia and the business sector relating to the topic. The 2018 edition of SFM took place from April 18th to 22nd. For more information on Student Forum Maastricht, please visit: www.student-forum.eu

Foreword

In the last decade we have been observers to the growing importance of civil society and to its emergence as a crucial player providing additional space for action in the governance system. Examples of an active civil society include not only societal upheavals such as the Euromaidan in Ukraine in 2013, the Moldovan Twitter revolution in 2009 or the Georgian Rose revolution in 2003, but also the increasing role as facilitator, innovator and service provider. Civil society has become a powerful source of social and political capital in different areas, including youth, education, research and innovation. What is more, given its potential to control and monitor state actions and to provide expertise and act as societal information hubs, we argue that civil society is the 5th branch of power in Europe. The EU has also attributed a central role to civil society and explored its potential in reform processes, as cooperation with solely the government has been neither sufficient nor successful in its neighbourhood.

At the latest Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in 2017, the EU and EaP countries demonstrated that approach through designing 20 deliverables for the EaP to be endorsed by 2020. These also address civil society and, inter alia, bring EU and EaP countries closer together. This offers tangible benefits to citizens through mobility partnerships, youth leadership programmes, an EaP European School and the integration of EaP and EU research and innovation systems. The efforts are carried out through initiatives such as EU4Youth, Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and EU4Innovation. With these deliverables the EU aims at investing in education, empowering the young generation, increasing intercultural contacts and improving research and innovation.

Nonetheless, several policy problems such as deficiencies in the grant allocation of Erasmus+ and the absence of high school exchange programmes; lack of international research cooperation and a high degree of technicality for the application process of Horizon 2020; and the recurrent issue of brain drain, are eminent to be tackled by policy practitioners in order to reach the abovementioned goals. The indicated problems emphasize the shortcomings of the current policies and become obstacles in their implementations. Against this background the aim of this policy brief is to identify the range of alternative policy solutions. For this purpose, we present solutions and recommendations supporting the realisation of the aimed visions. This policy brief concludes with practical policy recommendations that showcase the combined expertise of the authors.

Phillip Lugmayr & Dorina Baltag

Executive summary

The ultimate goal behind this policy brief is to increase unity across Europe and to dismantle mental barriers between the East and the West. We aim at bringing people together and allowing them to get to know Europe. We wish to support the EU in its objective to bring Brussels closer to its citizens and their neighbours. We seek to include the youth more and we want to contribute to the emergence of a European generation, one in which people do not forget their diverse origins while sticking together. We strongly believe that civil society is not only the beneficiary of a united Europe, but as Europe's 5th branch of power it can actively shape such a future.

The EU has clearly embraced the importance of civil society. It also expressed its will to come closer to the above vision. Despite many ambitious steps, we identified several obstacles. For example, Erasmus+ increases mobility, people-to-people contacts and the education level of many Europeans. However, we believe that the EU's flagship initiative may also have repercussions in relations the current imbalances within Europe: it can lead to higher emigration rates of educated and skilled people from poorer to richer countries or, its grant allocation does not take into account the financial backgrounds of applicants. Moreover, we think that Erasmus+ should include high school pupils as well, thus allowing more young people to discover Europe. With regards to Horizon 2020, we found a lack of international research cooperation and a high degree of technicality for the application process. Although the programme is visionary and unique in its size, we consider that it should be improved to reach the ambitious vision behind Horizon 2020.

Believing that Europe could become the world's creative, innovative and intellectual powerhouse, we suggest including more stakeholders into the educational world and bringing that world closer to the daily life of the EU's citizens and neighbours. For example, a digital platform could become the meeting place for academics and the private sector. The latter would get important insights into current research and could offer students scholarships supporting the education of experts in fields of common interest. Existing and popular initiatives could be also developed further. More young people could meet Europe if Erasmus+ had a high school component and a grant allocation paying more attention to the financial background of applicants, thus enabling poorer Europeans to experience the continent and the EU's achievements. Similarly, Horizon 2020 should include students as well. By doing so, we would have more excellent and innovative researchers and more big ideas made in Europe. The number of international research cooperation should be also increased, making the big ideas truly pan-European. Our policy options will increase cooperation and understanding between East and West on a civil society level, which in turn increases the civil society participation. Ultimately, the improvements will contribute to a revived European momentum and bring Brussels closer to its citizens and their neighbours.

Introduction

This policy brief suggests a strategy of strengthening employment, international cooperation and address brain drain issues within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) individual and regional economies through injecting digital means to education, through upgrading the Erasmus+ grant mechanism by applying a different grant-allocation framework and through rethinking Horizon 2020 so that university students become eligible participants.

Education

The Eastern Partnership agenda consists of priorities that include economic development and market opportunities and people-to-people contacts and it follows the Europe 2020 agenda in this regard. The EaP seeks to increase employability, as projected in one of the Europe 2020 deliverables. This in turn is linked to education through the establishment of skills and the transfer of knowledge. Thus, the promotion of investing funds into human capital will facilitate achieving the ultimate goal of injecting skills and productivity into labour markets for economic gain.

To that end, Commissioner Hahn for the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, has specified two measures in boosting education. Firstly, the EaP channels funds towards Erasmus+. Secondly, the EaP funds the construction of a European School in Tbilisi, Georgia, which is designed to provide an excellent education to non-EU citizens. Given that Commissioner Hahn emphasises specifically that employment must be increased through education enhancement, we argue that policy measures need to be further taken to increase employability of university graduates. Today, the digital world is crucial in this regard. On the one hand, digitalisation has not yet fully arrived in the civic and institutional societies of Eastern Europe and neighbours. On the other hand, high unemployment, low wages and low economic output is accompanied by an underdeveloped lacking educational sector. For example, Moldova is the poorest country in Europe and its education expenditure is as low as 428,778,700$ as of 2015 (Indexmundi, 2015). Since both digitalisation and education facilitate the ease of entry into labour markets, they need to be coupled. We identify the Eastern Partnership to be a suitable policy to realise this potential as it follows the Europe 2020 agenda that has been set out at the 2017 Riga Summit by participating partners. This, in turn, will address the imminent policy problems. Firstly, brain drain is perpetuated by the way Erasmus+ is conducted, because it disincentives employable academics to work in their EaP home country. Secondly, this results in lacking skilled specialists in already strained economies.

Youth

The 2017 OECD statistics on youth employability show that especially Southern and Eastern European countries as well as the Eastern Partnership countries rank the lowest. In South East Europe unemployment is more than twice as high for youth as for adults and over 20% higher than in the rest of the European Union (OECD, 2018). The issue of youth employability is closely linked to the lack of skills and experiences of job-applicants. This is where education plays an important role. Education implies, inter alia, one's opportunities to train and travel, especially through foreign experiences, including study abroad or taking on internships.

However, when looking at the current situation in the EU and its Eastern Partnership countries, we identify a lack of opportunities for High School and University students to train and travel abroad. On the one hand, the Erasmus+ programme, available for University students, increases its popularity steadily as more students use the opportunity to experience the EU's diversity. Despite being one of the most successful and iconic programmes (European Commission, 2017), today it is more accessible to students from higher-income families and an East-West divide is visible as EU student participation varies between EU Member States, resulting in a higher participation of Western EU students. Secondly, on High School level remains the lack of people-to-people contact opportunities between Eastern Partnership countries and EU Member States. Such opportunities may lead to higher connectivity between EaP countries and the EU as well as within the EU itself. The aim of this brief is to address these deficiencies and propose a rethinking the Erasmus+ grant mechanism by applying a different grant-allocation framework, which aims at more inclusivity as well as a High School exchange programme.

Research & Innovation

Research and innovation (R&I) are crucial for sustaining Europe's socio-economic model and values, as well as its global competitiveness which the EU is currently attaining via the Horizon 2020 framework programme. The aim of this policy brief is twofold: on the one hand, it intends to strengthen the cooperation between EU and EaP countries; on the other, to expand the scope of the Horizon 2020 eligible participants by extending it to university students. This proposal is motivated by the need to make the EU and its partners more competitive and become leaders in innovation, research and development (IRD) on a global scale.

This, in turn, will provide high additional value to the programme and improve its sustainability and the degree of competitiveness of the EU in IRD. It will also foster employability of the youth, boost excellence of the EU's Research and Innovation Policy and encourage more civic society participation. The relevance of this proposal reflects in the EU's goal of becoming a global leader in Research and Innovation. Horizon 2020 is the largest integrated R&I programme of its type in the world. However, the Horizon 2020 interim evaluation has identified several areas requiring improvement such as "underfunding represents an opportunity cost for Europe's promising R&I potential" and "third-country participations declined when compared to FP7" (European Commission, 2018, pp. 5 and 9). Hence, it is imperative that the EU starts investing into nurturing researchers that can cooperate internationally, starting with its immediate partners in the EaP.

Policy Problems

Education
a. *Brain Drain*

The problem with education in the area of the EaP is of an economic nature. Firstly, Erasmus+ does not incentivise graduates to stay in their domestic labour market to an appropriate extent. As numbers show, emigration of specialists is an issue, "one in three were offered a job by their host and one in ten went on to create their own company, according to the same 2014 study. With Erasmus+, recent graduates can also receive support to undertake a traineeship abroad as a route into the labour market." (European Commission, 2015).

Graduates who experienced education and life in a Western European country, may prefer the higher wages and better working conditions over their home country's labour market. Erasmus+ is indeed enabling and perpetuating this mechanism, as its alumni has a tendency to stay abroad. For example, Belarus has the highest benefit per capita of Erasmus+, but also the highest percentage of academic emigrants. According to UNESCO reports, 37 out of every 10,000 Belarusian students study abroad. In comparison, in Russia the number is 3,4; in Ukraine it is 9.3 (Rudnik, 2017).

b. *Low level of specialised skills*

Since specialists emigrate their expertise is not accessible in building the economies of EaP countries. The EaP aims to tackle this problem with the flagship initiative of European Schools. These projects bring great benefit to individuals from Tbilisi, however their impact for Europe 2020 may be limited. Year 2020 is barely two years away and the School's alumni are unlikely to have had an impact on their domestic economy at this stage. Therefore, building domestic human capital must happen in a short-term, structural manner.

Furthermore, there are more stakeholders then solely Georgians. The economy as a whole is a significant dependant on the EaP's policies. Businesses and thereby the labour market have a high demand for academic human capital, but the supply is lacking. The result is persistent low employment and economic stagnation. Therefore, the need to have graduates work in their actual home economy becomes apparent. Achieving employability through Erasmus+ may work; however incentivising people to work at home does not thus far (European Commission, 2016).

The result of this dilemma perpetuates the economic marginalisation the EaP countries are in. Enhancing their economic and human situation is the declared goal of the EaP, but in fact the emigration that results from its policies is detrimental to this. There is a need in the West for both low-skilled and high-skilled labour supplied from the East (Eurofound, 2014). The logic of the markets thus makes EaP graduate to better paying businesses, which is detrimental to the economic interests of the EaP regions. Therefore, labour supply needs to be channelled to the national, but also regional labour markets; not solely the West or European Union's.

2. Youth
a. *Deficiencies in the grant-allocation of the Erasmus+ grant*

When looking at student participation between countries in absolute terms, a striking difference between East and West is visible. Germany, with a participation of 40,089 students in 2016, is using the Erasmus+ programme to a greater extent than for instance Bulgaria, with 2,373. According to the Erasmus+ Annual Report (European Commission, 2017), students from Western European countries have a higher participation rate than students from Eastern countries (examples: 2.5% of all Spanish students / 2.19% of all French students and 0.8 % in Bulgaria / 0.9 % in Poland). This can be partly explained by cross-border income inequalities within the European Union. Comparing countries GDP data of 2017, Eastern European citizens face a higher financial burden when going on Erasmus in comparison to Western European citizens, as a consequence of higher wages and living standards in Western EU countries compared to the East (Eurostat, 2016). Currently, the amount of funding a student receives when studying abroad within the framework of Erasmus+ depends on the host countries costs of living and the duration of the students stay. These factors are of clear relevance, nevertheless, fairness could be increased by making budget-allocation dependable on a third factor, which takes family-income into account. Therefore, including a factor concerning income inequalities in the grant-allocation framework of EU funds made available through Erasmus+ will make the programme more inclusive, increases its fairness and, as an effect in the long-run, increases the participation of Eastern State citizens as students from countries with an average lower-income profit of the additional factor.

b. *Lack of High School exchange programmes*

We detect a lack of opportunities available at High-School level concerning education opportunities between EU and Eastern European students. Currently, there is no opportunity for High-School students to participate in an exchange between EU and Eastern Partnership Countries as well as between the Eastern Partnership Countries themselves. There is no exchange programme which helps students from those areas to connect and thereby, improve, amongst others, their language skills as well as knowledge in various fields (cultural, social etc.). Connecting High-School students thus directly enhances people-to-people contact among youth and leads to building bridges between East and West. In the long-run, this will lead to higher educated and open-minded job-applicants, leading to a possible reduction of youth unemployability.
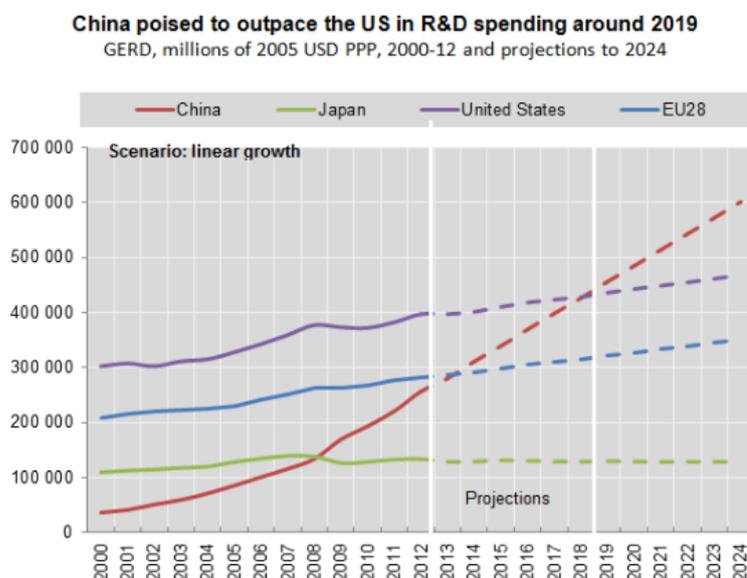
Research & Innovation

Horizon 2020 and its EU4Innovation initiative are an important framework to extend the quality and competitiveness of research and innovation of the EU and EaP countries, harmonise academic research procedures and increase international research cooperation. The strong satisfaction that stakeholders expressed towards the European Commission in the 2018 interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 is proof of that. However, R&I in the EU has proven not to be internationally competitive yet, while international cooperation in the field is declining and the application process of Horizon 2020 funding is highly technical.

While Horizon 2020 largely contributed to the EU's competitiveness in the field of Research and Innovation, the Union's expenditure in Research and innovation is still lagging behind the

US and has now also been overtaken by China, as seen in graph 1. Lagging behind in research and innovation will have negative long-term consequences on the economic competitiveness of the EU and employability possibilities.

Graph 1:

China poised to outpace the US in R&D spending around 2019
GERD, millions of 2005 USD PPP, 2000-12 and projections to 2024

Source: OECD, 2018

Thus, the impact of Horizon 2020 needs to be increased in this area and funding possibilities need to be opened up to a larger group of beneficiaries. While having excellence as the main criteria for allocating funding has helped the first scientific publications of Horizon 2020 to be cited already at twice the world average rate (European Commission, 2018), this criterion is exclusive to a target group that is already educated as only excellent proposals receive funding. Thus, Horizon 2020 does not contribute enough to target groups including young researchers in the process of becoming excellent and innovative researchers.

a. *Lack of International Research Cooperation*

"While Horizon 2020 has a broad international outreach and openness to the world, third-country participations declined when compared to FP7" (p. 8) according to the 2018 Interim Evaluation Report on Horizon 2020 by the European Commission. On the national level, less than 1 % of funding for scientific research and innovation is spent on transnational projects. This rather strengthens the degree of separation of research formats between countries and does not add to cultural understanding between researchers that transnational projects entail. The EU's disadvantage in international competitiveness reflects that it is not making use of a valuable resource: a tightly interconnected international network of high quality education institutions within EU territory, strong relations with partner states and a large educated, intercultural student population. There is little initiative for students as well as professional

researchers in EU neighbour countries to engage in serious research, and therefore little innovation.

b. *High degree of technicality of Horizon 2020*

On a technical level, stakeholders have pointed out within the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 that the many instruments and initiatives that were previously developed, with the complexity it entails, are difficult to understand and may lead to overlapping initiatives (European Commission, 2018). Thus, applying for funding within Horizon 2020 and its different sections such as the EU4Innovation initiative is a confusing process and thus leads to less beneficiaries having access to the funding opportunity.

Policy Options

Education

With a focus on establishing resilient societies in the EaP countries, the proposed solutions part from the idea of the enhancement and promotion of already existing instruments. To that aim, the Erasmus+ Programme, the Fulbright Exchange Programme and digital platforms that connect academic professionals are all starting points to the following identified proposed policy options solution.

a. *Brain Gain*

To tackle the general problem of brain drain and the complexity of this problem, we see the need of an updated digital education system and we part from the framework of an existing platform model called UACES (Academic Association for Contemporary European Studies). UACES consists of a digital platform which brings together academics, students and practitioners in all fields of contemporary European Studies from different universities in the UK. However, UACES has a much more narrow scope limiting itself to EU Studies. Our inclusive model includes all professional fields creating a broader scope and making it more accessible. Therefore, the platform we are proposing has a multi-dimensional approach as it consists of creating different levels of connectivity throughout Europe. The first level is directly associated to the EaP countries and the aim of further enhancing the cooperation within the communities. The platform is a digital instrument which has a virtual dimension as well as a physical one. The online dimension of the platform serves the end of connecting academic researchers and practitioners through the exchange of existing knowledge at local and regional level within the EaP countries. The physical dimension of the platform concerns its possible projections into the real world: it functions as a database where information about the organization of conferences, events and meetings can be found. The online platform will be designed by IT specialists and will be maintained by EaP representatives working in Eastern Partnership countries. The representatives of the EU delegation to the Eastern Partnership countries are the overarching authority to ensure legitimacy within the platform throughout its use. More precisely, they would function as liaisons between universities in the EaP countries and the EU institutions involved.

The creation of this platform can be funded through the current EaP budget. According to the European Commission (2010), funds are installed in three phases and used for three main purposes: Comprehensive Institution Building programmes, aimed at supporting reforms (approximately €175 million); Pilot regional development programmes, aimed at addressing regional economic and social disparities (approximately €75 million); and Implementation of the Eastern Partnership, focusing on democracy, governance and stability, economic integration and convergence with EU policies, energy security, and contacts between people with the aim of bringing the partners closer to the EU (approximately €350 million). The conception of this policy is adaptable enough to be allocated to one of the three branches.

Finally, regional connectivity should be established. Currently, there is no immediate point of encounter between business and academia. Therefore such a virtual forum will provide the means for the private sector to directly communicate with suitable human capital and vice-versa. Apart from this connection, the multilateral communication between the EaP countries themselves will also be enhanced. The platform we propose would pool all active university teachers, students and researchers in EaP countries of all disciplines and connect them with the pan-Eastern business sector.

b. *Strengthening specialised skills*

In addition to addressing brain drain, the platform also focuses on strengthening specialised skills. Employability is increased through cultural exchange with foreign countries. The effectiveness of this logic has been proven by the Erasmus+ programme. Even five to ten years after graduation from university, the unemployment rate of mobile students is lower than for non-mobile students. The largest difference can be found in Southern Europe with 56% less Erasmus alumni experiencing unemployment than non-mobiles (European Union, 2016). Our twist is that there should be a correspondence between the needs of local businesses' regarding the lack of specialised skills and the granting of Erasmus+ scholarships.

Therefore, the platform will encompass and accommodate all European universities and the private sector: it will be open and inclusive to all university students in EaP countries as well as businesses and industries. The platform will build bridges between the universities and the private sector. On the one hand, the private sector, as an important stakeholder, will have access to the academic events and research results offered within the platform. On the other, the private sector could provide individual students with scholarships that fund an exchange abroad where they gather expertise and perspective in a similar manner to Erasmus+. In return, students would agree by contract to a compulsory work period for their funding business. This programme would be the 'Fullrasmus' which incorporates the idea of the existing US Fulbright programme and the European Erasmus+ programme.

In addition, the creation and use of the platform would significantly streamline and improve digitalisation in the marginalised Eastern partners. It will add value to the Commissioner's flagship of the European School in Tbilisi. Digitising the labour market gives potency to the concern of workers and frees them from the economic deadlock caused by the lacking information and communication within regional markets. Moreover, the digital platform will be a great networking channel for a wide variety of actors within EaP and EU member-states from academia to private sector.

Youth

a. *Implementing an additional Erasmus+ grant-allocation factor taking the applicant's financial situation into account*

The current Erasmus+ funding mechanism varies from a minimum of €150 up to a maximum of €390. The grant-allocation factor can be done based on the proportionality principle and technically basing it on the following three components.

1.   A Floor-allowance

The minimum floor-allowance is the minimum amount of money that applicants receive when deciding to request the Erasmus+ grant. This sum is available to everyone eligible to the Erasmus+ programme and, as such, it can be seen as the basic component of the grant. Hence, the floor quota can be requested by any applicant, despite their socio-economic conditions.

2.   The income-related determinant

This determinant shall depend on the family-income of the applicant compared to the average European income (currently at 1,520 (2017)). Furthermore, the factor shall take family situations, including the number of children etc. into account. Income-differences shall be divided in three categories, namely high, discrete, lower, which in turn shall facilitate grant-allocation authorities categorizing the applicant (explained in Table 1 below).

3.   The Destination Determinant

Being part of the established Erasmus+ grant framework, the destination remains a part of grant-allocation. The destination determinant shall be distributed according to the cost of life index of the applicant's destination area. Therefore, the higher the cost of living in the applicant's destination country, the larger the amount of money the applicant will receive. Accordingly, we have again categorized the Cost of Living Index across countries ranging from low, discrete, average, high. Therefore, we deem that the categories may be formulated between a range of maximum score of 150 and a minimum one of 0. The index works as an indicator of living costs, such as costs of consumer goods, transportation and other utilities, however, excludes accommodation expenses such as rent or mortgage. Money to the applicant is allocated depending on the category he/she falls in.

Table 1: Cost of Living Index	
Category	Range of the cost of living index
Low	0-37.5
Discrete	37.6-75

Average	75.1-112.5
High	112.6-150

b. *Establishing a High School exchange programme between EU students and students from EaP countries as well as within the EaP countries within the framework of Erasmus+*

We propose adding High School exchange programmes within the framework of Erasmus+ to increase people-to-people contacts and student cross-border mobility, which, in the long-run, leads to increasing skills and knowledge leading to higher qualifications. Through the implementation of the programme, High School students have the chance to travel to another country and spend time with host families. The duration can either be for 3 or 6 months. Such experience holds as the main aim the cultural and educational exchange between the participants. Such programmes can follow a similar logic to the existing High School exchanges between French and German high schools such as the Brigitte-Sauzay Programme (OFAJ/DFJW, 2018) or the Nacel Programme (Nacel, 2018). The programmes provide a platform in which prospective exchange students can find their exchange partners and have the chance to communicate through online messages. Whereas the communication is mainly done by the prospective exchange students themselves, an allowance fund shall provide for the students living costs and travelling during the exchange, also leading to the programme being accessible to everyone and not depending on income variables. Through such a programme connectivity is enhanced and social mobility between Eastern and Western countries can be guaranteed.

Research & Innovation

So far, the funding is mainly distributed based on the criteria of excellence. This is a clear limitation of the potential outcomes and achievements of the Horizon 2020 framework. To achieve the objective of improved competitiveness in Research and Innovation, it is essential that funding opportunities reach all levels of academia. The measure should broaden its focus by not only looking at the already achieved level of excellence and awarding successful researchers, but also at the potential a research proposal has to get to that level. Innovation does not come from excellent academic skills but from the potential of the idea behind it. Such criteria could thus include relevance of the proposed topic in the specific research field and how innovative the potential findings are. Adding criteria to the selection process is feasible and would allow not only to focus on the already established research elite but on creating the future generation. The funding criteria can be extended or changed, which ensures flexibility in case of problems in the implementation process. Furthermore, funding should be extended to researchers still in the process of developing their research skills, such as university students. Investing in the education of this target group makes them more competitive in the long run and thus makes the measure more sustainable.

a. *Strengthening international cooperation*

Reallocating the funding to strengthen international cooperation, in particular in the EaP, would increase cultural understanding between researchers both on a professional and a personal level. Being able to carry out research with people from different countries further

extends the research possibilities thanks to access to sources in different languages and possibilities of field work across large geographical distances. Furthermore, international research cooperation will increase the level of integration of research procedures and academic formats among Member States and third countries which would in turn facilitate additional cooperation. The ultimate long-term objective of such a policy option is the strengthening of the competitiveness of the EU and EaP countries in the international arena. Its achievement will come with the increased cooperation between researchers in the EU and EaP countries and an improved excellence in their projects.

b. *Simplifying the application process*

The EU4Innovation scheme within Horizon 2020 has potential but does not present a clear application process and leads to confusion among applicants about eligibility and application procedure. From a newcomer's perspective, the relationship between these two programs is difficult to understand. To address this issue and disorientation about the application procedure, a possible solution is to create a website where the Horizon 2020 framework and the EU4Innovation are clearly and simply introduced. A website targeted to researchers and institutions from EaP countries could serve as the one and only point of reference for applicants. Here, applicants would be able to find all the information, application forms, contact information and references they need. This will greatly simplify the overall procedure, increase the transparency of the frameworks and provide a single point of reference. This will ultimately incentivise more participants to apply and receive funding in a more efficient and timely manner with less administrative hassle. Moreover, this solution is feasible and efficient. The expenditure to create and maintain a website such as this will not require significant resource spending and working hours, but will in turn incentivise immeasurably the EU's desire to attract and maintain academic talent. In the short term, the focus of this policy option is to raise awareness of the initiative among potential supervisors and university students in the EU member states and EaP countries. In the long run, the initiative and the funding this policy option makes available will become widely known and can be advertised in universities, promoting the research cooperation between EU and EaP countries.

As result of considering such policy options, students will learn to work with a funding institution and get the opportunity to improve their transferable research skills. In addition, it will connect policies on R&I, Youth and Education, as well as increase the cooperation with 3rd countries within the Horizon 2020 framework. Moreover, it will contribute in creating a standard research process which will be easier to approach by students from all the EU and EaP countries. Consequently, this will increase the international competitiveness of students and the understanding between East and West on civil society level. By embracing cooperation between EU and EaP research projects, it will also increase the competitiveness of university research and foster excellence in research and innovation in EU and EaP countries. Ultimately, this will improve international standing of EU and EaP countries' universities and strengthen competitiveness through East and West cooperation.

Recommendations

Education

- Design and implement of a digital platform. This platform will host online forums and the publication of academic papers and advertise existing scholarships in the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme as well as the Fullrasmus Programme.

- Bring academia and the private sector together by creating Fullrasmus. The private sector would get insights into research results and could provide individual students with scholarships funding an exchange abroad in return for a contract to a compulsory work period for the financing enterprise.

- In the short-term, the initial step to be taken is the design of the platform. As the pilot-version of the platform has been established and can be tested, it should be able to assemble members of the Academia as utilizers for the publishing of papers; professional networking and the organisation of conferences.

- In the long-term, the digital platform should be in the capacity of storing data regarding academic research, serving as an online forum for a broader number of Academia members and practitioners.

Youth

- Implement the Erasmus+ programme based on the new grant-allocation scheme. This scheme will be based on the proportionality principle implied by the three components.

- Drafting and Implementing an Erasmus+ High School component. This should be realized through implementing the High School exchange programmes.

Research & Innovation

- Open Horizon 2020 for eligible university student participants. The fundamental vision behind this proposal is that university students from EU and EaP countries will cooperate on international research projects which will receive funding through Horizon 2020 (or its succeeding framework). In their research, they will be supervised by a qualified university professor, research fellow or tutor. Selection criteria for project funding are similar to current Horizon 2020 criteria while ensuring that the innovative potential of the idea and the usefulness of the expected findings is taken into account in addition to excellence. If funding is granted, the coordinating professor as well as the application partners will gather a group of motivated and qualified university students in which they see capacity and potential to carry out the research project jointly. The allocated budget can be utilized freely within the needs of the individual projects, such as (but not limited to) required equipment or travel costs.

- Increase the number of international cooperation by increasing the number of EaP partners. Calls for proposals which are in conformity with the EU's general priorities are launched by the Horizon 2020 staff and posted on a website specifically designed for this initiative, apart from the regular calls. Project proposals are then submitted by supervisors. When submitting the proposal, it will be required to indicate at least one partner from the EaP countries, if the main applicant is from within the EU and vice

versa. Supervisors from EU and EaP are equally able to submit proposals and act as project coordinators. Partnerships can be built up through the already existing partnership search of Horizon 2020 or through private networks.

- Re-designing an overarching Horizon2020 information campaign in order to raise awareness of the initiative among potential supervisors and university students in the EU member states and EaP countries. An information campaign could be a tool to spread awareness of the funding mechanism and promote the existing funding opportunities in the EaP countries, e.g. through EU4Innovation. Doing this will increase international research cooperation while not requiring a significant further budget.

Concluding remarks

Education

Our recommendations serve the purpose of establishing a mechanism that fulfils one of the goals of a Europe 2020 deliverable, i.e. boosting employability. This aim can be delivered by strengthening the link between employability and digitisation within the EaP. This can be achieved through the EaP countries retaining their experts. Erasmus+ is an excellent programme that encourages expertise and competitiveness therefore we propose that Fullrasmus programme will work. Similarly, flagship initiatives like the European School have an undoubtedly benefit for its attendees, however its impact is not immediate or broad enough to tackle the problems this policy brief identifies. Therefore, our platform includes both cultural exchange and incentive to work at home. Big and small businesses are strengthened, the national output is increased, which attracts investments and provides more funds for education expenditure. Its structure also furthers digitisation that is severely needed. In conclusion, our policy brief serves to bridge the educational, digital and thereby economic gap between the East and West.

Youth

One of the largest challenges European youth is facing concerns unemployment. Youth unemployment is partly due to lack of skills and knowledge which is closely related to the lack of youth opportunities. Through embracing an inclusive Erasmus + grant allocation budget and implementing High School exchange programmes there is an window of opportunity possible to address issues such as unemployment. And even more so, this will also improve people-to-people contact on high school and university level. Increase the participation of people-to-people youth contact leads the way to increase the participant's skills, leading to them being higher qualified job-applicants in the long-run.

Research & Innovation

The recommendations made intend to strengthen the cooperation between EU and EaP countries while also expanding the scope of the Horizon 2020 eligible participants by extending it to university students. This builds up on the background of shortcomings within Horizon 2020 in EU Research and Innovation Policy, identified as an overall lack of global competitiveness of the EU and EaP countries in this field. Therefore, Horizon 2020 needs to open up to other target groups such as university students, and support their research. International cooperation has been declining in Research and Innovation, which would be tackled by reallocating the budget to specifically fund transnational projects. Furthermore, the application process for research funding has been identified as being currently unclear for possible applicants, especially young researches with little or no experience with EU funding instruments. The proposed policy solution, which is opening up the already available funding to university students and simultaneously strengthens cooperation with EaP countries, connects these dots: it increases the EU's international competitiveness in Research and Innovation and actively contributes to EaP programme objectives by building stronger ties with Eastern Partnership countries on a civil society level.

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