

Bring the Erasmus Generation to the plenary of the Conference on the future of Europe

Open letter from the Erasmus Student Network to the Executive

Board of the CoFoE

Ms. Dubravka Šuica,
Co-chair of the Executive Board, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography
Mr. Guy Verhofstadt,
Co-chair of the Executive Board
Mr. Gasper Dovzan,
Co-chair of the Executive Board, Slovenian Secretary of State for EU Affairs
Distinguished members of the Executive Board,

Dear Co-chairs and Members of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe,

On behalf of the Erasmus Student Network, the largest Erasmus student and alumni association, it is my honour to address you in order to present our request for a seat in the plenary of the Conference on the future of Europe, representing the Erasmus Generation.

The Conference on the Future of Europe aims to be the biggest participatory exercise ever carried out by the European Union. The [joint declaration](#) states that “European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project.” It is quite clear that the success of the whole process will depend on the joint capacity of institutions and civil society organisations to achieve that goal.

As the Conference moves forward and the Citizens’ panels are about to start, we believe it is important to highlight the fact that millions of “Europeans from all walks of life and corners of the Union” have already found the best possible channel to participate in shaping the future of Europe in the Erasmus programme.

Erasmus has provided a public sphere for European citizens to get to know each other, experience the many achievements of European integration first-hand and reflect on the challenges that lay ahead. If we want to foster inclusive pan-European dialogues, as the Conference aims to do, the success of the Erasmus should be a source of inspiration.

There is no better example of European added value than what this programme gives to Europe in terms of bringing citizens together and creating a common European identity. [Our research](#) on the impact of the Erasmus Student Network shows how local communities across our Union benefit directly from having hundreds of Erasmus students in a number of ways. In fact, these students bring families and friends to less known cities and towns, volunteer to address local societal challenges, and foster multilingualism and intercultural dialogue while sharing their accommodation and living experiences with local friends. We should build upon these successes to improve people-to-people dialogues across the European Union and enrich the participatory process of the Conference.

The term “Erasmus Generation” has gained prominence in the last few years. In the Erasmus Student Network, we believe this Generation includes all those people who share the values that the Erasmus+ programme represents, such as unity in diversity, solidarity, cooperation, and curiosity. Now, more than ten million former and current participants belong to this Generation, along with many other friends, professors, and family members whose lives have also changed. They are the best examples of a diverse European way of life that makes our Union unique.

In [different pan-European surveys](#), young Europeans express that the freedom to travel, work, and study anywhere in our Union is one of the biggest benefits of the EU. Freedom of movement is a cornerstone of the European Union, but it still requires improvement so that more citizens can fully benefit from it. There will be no progress in European integration if Europeans are not given the opportunity to get to know each other.

Erasmus students and alumni fully understand both the importance of freedom of movement and the barriers and challenges that still persist in its implementation. The [Erasmus Impact Study](#) and our own [ESNSurvey](#) show that Erasmus students are more likely to continue their studies in another country, to have partners and friends from other nations, and to work abroad. Bringing this perspective to the plenary of the Conference will drastically enrich the debate about one of the central topics for the future of the EU, especially considering the colossal damage that the pandemic has caused to this key freedom.

In her [speech](#) at the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe, President Von der Leyen addressed the Erasmus Generation directly, saying that the Conference wanted to hear the voices “From Erasmus students to those who took to the streets in the Pulse of Europe demonstrations”. We appreciate this reference, and we believe that there is no better way to ensure this engagement than bringing the key Erasmus organisation to the place where key discussions will happen: the plenary.

Vice-President Schinas has recently expressed that [the Erasmus Generation has a duty to defend Europe](#). In the Erasmus Student Network, we wholeheartedly share this perspective, and believe this is already happening: in our [ESNSurvey 2019](#), in light of the European

elections, we found that the Erasmus alumni are much more likely to vote at the EP elections, engage more with the civil society, and are more interested in European affairs. However, the survey also found that Erasmus participants still find tremendous barriers to participate in elections while they are abroad and that they believe that more European civic education is needed in order to increase the participation of young people in the European Union's public life. Being represented in the plenary of the Conference would allow us to debate these topics and come up with concrete proposals to solve these problematic issues.

In our 32 years of history, the Erasmus Student Network has given voice to the Erasmus Generation, helping to make the Erasmus+ programme a success. Our Network of 530 local associations present in all the Member States of the European Union and 15 countries of our European Neighbourhood ensures a huge outreach which we have repeatedly proved by engaging in campaigns to connect the European Union to young citizens, such as the [#ThisTimeImVoting](#) campaign, and continuously gathering data about the interests, needs and ideas of Erasmus students and alumni. The day-to-day work we do with them makes us the ideal representative to ensure that the many voices that make up this generation that wants to shape the future of Europe are heard.

A wide range of European leaders and decision-makers have praised the importance of the Erasmus+ programme for the European Union, including [Emmanuel Macron](#) and [Angela Merkel](#). President Von der Leyen [considered it](#) "one of the unifying achievements in the history of our Union" and compared [its impact](#) with the recent Next Generation EU. European citizens agree with this vision, considering Erasmus the [third biggest achievement of the European Union](#), right after freedom of movement and peace. In this defining moment for the future of our Union, we should ensure that those who understand and value Europe the most are properly represented in the discussion. The Erasmus Generation is ready to give back to Europe everything Europe has given to the Erasmus Generation.

We thank you for your attention and we hope you will consider our proposal.

On behalf of the Erasmus Student Network,

Juan Rayón González

President of the Erasmus Student Network

