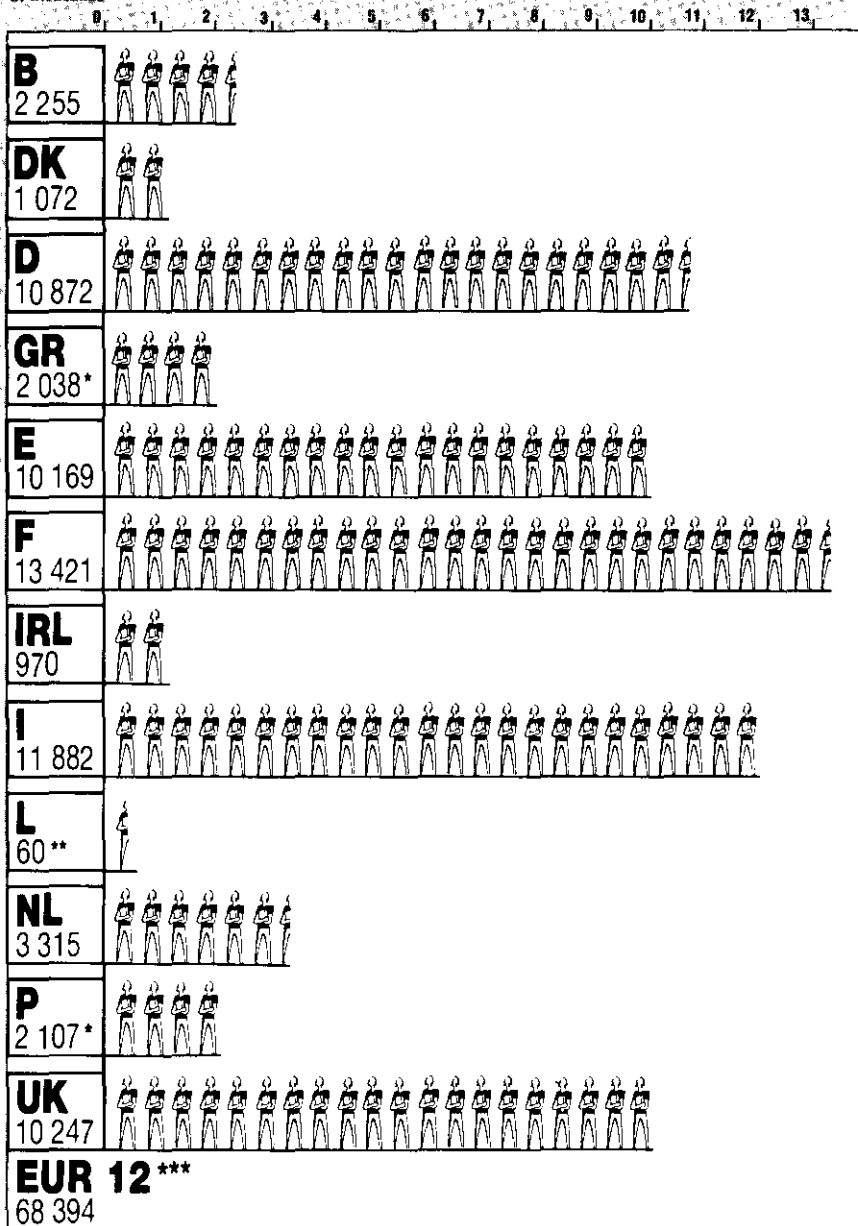


EUROPEAN FILE

For young people:
Comett, Erasmus,
'YES for Europe'

Numbers of schoolchildren and university students (full-time study) in the countries of the European Community (1985-86)

in thousands



* 1984/85. ** 1982/83. *** estimated.

Source: Eurostat.

Comett, Erasmus, 'YES for Europe': three terms which, for the moment, may mean little to those not directly concerned by European policy on education and youth. Admittedly they are three new programmes whose first phase runs more or less from 1987 to 1990. During this period, however, they will involve tens of thousands of students and young people.

Today, the European Community has set itself new objectives. In the forefront of these is the completion of a large internal market without frontiers by the end of 1992. With that in mind, it is more important than ever to make full use of human resources. The education and training of the young, who will live in and give life to the Europe of tomorrow, must henceforth be a crucial element in Community cooperation. A new stage is now being initiated in this respect through the Comett, Erasmus, and 'YES for Europe' programmes. They should help to revive growth, and therefore employment, and help to build a 'People's Europe'.

Of the 320 million people who live in the Community, 70 million are schoolchildren and students in higher education, and nearly 5 million are teachers. If parents are included, it can be estimated that one in two Europeans is affected by the problems of education. However, in spite of this numerical importance, the policy on education is one of the most recent drawn up by the European Community. Non-existent during the first years of the 'common market' (1958-72), it only began to be developed from 1973 onwards. Since 1985, however, it has taken on new impetus, in the context of a Community more concerned to establish a 'People's Europe'. A previous *European file* has described the main thrust of Community education policy.¹ Some of the stages in its development can be briefly recalled:

- 1973: a directorate for education is established in the European Commission.
- 1976: the Council of Ministers adopts a first action programme.
- 1980: Eurydice, the information network on the various education policies in Community countries, goes into operation.
- 1985: the European Commission submits its first proposals for the Comett and Erasmus programmes. These are followed in 1986 by a proposal on 'YES for Europe'.

The implementation of a European education policy has proven extremely complex. Each Member State is characterized by systems, structures, and methods peculiar to itself. While respecting this rich diversity, the Community is trying to encourage some convergence. Clearly, the same teaching cannot be proposed for a young Scottish child and a young Sicilian. But, in view of the completion of the single market in 1992, both should be able to finish their schooling with qualifications of the same quality.

¹ 'The European Community and education', *European file*, No 3/85.

The European Community is therefore trying to orient its activities towards the following areas:

- Inter-connections between educational systems: the Eurydice network, grants for study visits, teacher training.
- Foreign language teaching.
- Equality of opportunity for girls and boys, for the children of migrant workers, for the handicapped. Also the fight against illiteracy and failure at school.
- Introduction of new information technologies (NIT) in school systems.
- Cooperation between universities and industry in training for new technologies (Comett programme).
- Student mobility: Erasmus programme, inter-university cooperation and recognition of diplomas.
- Youth exchanges: exchange programme for young workers and the 'YES for Europe' programme.

Three programmes are presented in this file. For each, details are given as regards the experiments on which they are based, their objectives and their principal areas of activity.

The Comett programme

'Comett' is not a space programme! It simply stands for the 'programme of the Community in education and training for technology'. Its purpose is to encourage cooperation between universities and industry, at European level.

Comett is the result of a sudden awareness by the European Community of the urgency and importance of improving its technological base, in order to find new competitive strength. Europe has resolutely committed itself to scientific and technological research,¹ but this alone is not sufficient. The great effort must be supplemented by a vigorous policy of investing in the development of the Community's human resources. The rapid progress of the new technologies demands young people and adults with excellent training who are prepared to face up to the changes they will meet during the course of their working life. Know-how, adaptability and an enterprising spirit are qualities which are increasingly sought after. Without them, Europe will not be able to remain competitive, to encourage growth or to create new employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the universities do not provide in sufficient quantity or quality the high-level human resources

¹ See 'European technological research and development', *European file*, No 19/87.

(engineers, highly-skilled technicians, etc.) demanded by the new technologies and by the firms that use them. This shortage is particularly striking when the situation in the Community is compared with that of its principal competitors, the United States of America and Japan. Recent surveys show that, in a number of areas, the shortage of highly qualified personnel is today considered an even more serious problem than the lack of finance for development or production costs.

In recent years, several Member States have taken measures to combine interdisciplinary education with work experience. Different forms of cooperation have been devised: 'technological parks', university-industry 'marriage bureaux', etc. Most such experiments are, however, essentially concerned with innovation, and research and development. Their effects on training and retraining are only indirect. On the other hand, the Community research programme Esprit, devoted to information technologies, has opened the door to European technological cooperation between industry and universities. It only remained to provide a similar commitment in the field of advanced training. The Comett programme answers this need. Its objectives are the following:

- To encourage synergy between the academic world and the world of industry.
- To promote a European identity through student placements in firms located in other Member States.
- To encourage economies of scale through the joint organization of new training programmes.
- To improve the initial training of students and the continued training of skilled personnel and executive staff.
- To develop the level of training in response to technological and social changes.
- To strengthen and diversify possibilities for training at local, regional and national levels.
- To exploit the opportunities offered by the new information and communication technologies.

The Comett programme was approved by the Community's Council of Ministers on 24 July 1986. Its first operational phase, launched in January 1987 following a preparatory year, covers a three-year period from 1987 to 1989. Its total appropriation was initially set at 45 million ECU,¹ but a reassessment of this figure is envisaged for the end of 1988. The first phase centres on five fields of activity in which projects will be invited:

¹ 1 ECU (European currency unit) = about £ 0.7, Ir £ 0.77 or US \$ 1.21 (at exchange rates current on 25 February 1988).

- The creation of a network of university-industry training partnerships (UITP).
- The financing of student placements, to allow students to work in firms located in Member States other than their own, and of grants to encourage transnational exchanges of personnel between universities and industry.
- Transnational projects for continuing training, carried out jointly by universities and industry.
- The finalization of multimedia training systems which place the emphasis on the training of trainers and on small and medium-sized firms.
- The exchange of information and experience and the dissemination of the most innovatory practices.

In 1987, the year it was launched, the Comett programme enabled the Community to finance 108 university-industry training partnerships, 1 067 transnational placements in industry for students, 73 transnational fellowships for the training of executives from industry and universities, 136 transnational projects for continuing training and 62 multilateral initiatives aimed at developing multimedia training systems.

Administered by the European Commission, with the assistance of a committee of experts composed of representatives from the Member States, the Comett programme takes its place among other Community activities in the areas of education and training, research and development, and technological cooperation: of particular concern here are the Esprit, Brite, RACE and Sprint programmes as well as the plan to encourage scientific cooperation and exchange. In addition, there is to be close cooperation with the Delta research and development programme which deals with the use of new technologies in education.

A second phase of the programme is foreseen for 1990-92. This should consolidate, strengthen and amend programme activities, in the light of the experience gained.

Strengthening university-industry cooperation will reduce the obstacles to innovation and the application of new technologies. The European dimension will supply to training the essential element to support the industrial and technological progress of an interdependent Europe. The Comett programme is therefore directly involved in the achievement of the large internal market forecast for 1992.

The Erasmus programme

By adopting Erasmus, a programme intended to encourage student mobility, the European Community has laid a corner-stone in the creation of a 'People's Europe'. Erasmus (European Community action scheme for the mobility of university students) involves 3 600 higher education establishments and some six million students. It provides an opportunity for some of these students to do part of their studies in a university in another Member State.

In an increasingly interdependent Community, there is as never before a need for persons not only competent in another language, but also capable of communicating and cooperating with partners in other countries on the basis of a better understanding of the economic and social structures of their neighbours. Furthermore, in an even more competitive world, it is vital to take account of the need for increased cooperation with European partners. To encourage such a mentality among students is one of the best ways of ensuring that future generations of decision-makers will regard joint ventures with other Community countries as a natural and positive line of action rather than a potential source of risks and dangers.

Paradoxically, European students are today relatively less mobile than they were five centuries ago, in the time of Erasmus. At the present time, the proportion of students enrolled at a university in another Member State is well below 1%! It was urgently necessary to resume an ancient tradition and encourage student exchanges and cooperation between European universities.

Erasmus follows on from numerous experiments carried out during the pilot phase of university cooperation launched in 1976. An experiment to be particularly drawn on from that period is the 'joint study programmes', which achieved remarkable results, but which had very limited impact because of their small budget. The objectives of the Erasmus programme are:

- To increase significantly the number of students who spend a period of study in another Community country as an integral part of their course, so that Europe will have available to it executives with direct experience of the economic and social life in other Member States.
- To promote wide and intensive cooperation between universities in Community countries.
- To exploit the intellectual potential of the universities through greater mobility for students and teaching staff.
- To strengthen relations between the people of different Member States in order to consolidate the concept of a 'People's Europe'.

Adopted on 15 June 1987 following long and difficult negotiations, the Erasmus programme was allocated a modest 85 million ECU for the first three years (July 1987 to June 1990). This budget is distributed as follows: 10 million for the first year, 30 million for the second year and 45 million for the third year. During the third year, the budget share to be devoted to student mobility grants will be double that reserved for other activities. The overall budget is certainly a modest one in comparison with the Commission's initial proposal (175 million ECU), but it is a permanent programme and the yearly distribution of the allocation is now increasing, which augurs well for 1990.

The European Commission is responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus programme. It is assisted by a consultative committee composed of two representatives from each Member State, of whom at least one comes from a university. Mobility grants are administered by the Member States themselves, which helps to decentralize and simplify the management of the programme.

There are four lines of action to encourage student mobility:

- The launching of a European university cooperation network: participating universities conclude agreements for student and teacher exchanges; they draw up joint teaching programmes. The European Community provides on average 10 000 ECU (this can go up to a maximum of 25 000 ECU) for each participating institute.
- Grants for students who follow a study period of at least one term in another Member State. To avail of such grants, the period of study spent abroad must take place after the first year of higher education and must be fully recognized by the original university. Average grants are 2 000 ECU (with a maximum of 5 000 ECU) and cover costs resulting from the move abroad (travel expenses, difference in the cost of living, language preparation, etc.). In addition, the holder of an Erasmus grant enjoys the following advantages:
 - The second university does not require an enrolment fee and the grant-holder continues, where necessary, to pay fees to the university attended in his own country.
 - The holder of an Erasmus grant, who is already receiving a subsistence grant in his country of origin, retains the benefit of this during the period of study spent in the second university.
- Promoting academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study spent abroad. Among the measures envisaged are:
 - The development of a European course credit transfer system (ECTS): a group of universities is invited to participate in a pilot project to establish a system of course credits transferable throughout the whole of the Community.
 - The continued development of the Community network of national academic recognition information centres (Naric).
- Complementary measures: support for university associations; organization of intensive courses; financing of publications (*Student Handbook*, etc.); award of an annual Erasmus prize.

In 1987, its first year of existence, the Erasmus programme financed 398 interuniversity cooperation programmes involving over 850 higher education institutes, 1 138 study visits for teachers and 3 000 mobility grants for students

participating in the programmes. Between 1987 and 1990, at least 25 000 European students will benefit from Erasmus and some 1 700 higher education institutes (one in two!) will receive financial assistance to allow them to draw up exchange programmes. The Erasmus programme is therefore of direct relevance to the European citizen.

'YES for Europe'

After Comett and Erasmus, which concern students in higher education, this is a programme open to all young Europeans. It is called 'YES (youth exchange scheme) for Europe', although 'Youth for Europe' has been proposed. This highly ambitious project, still under discussion between Ministers, should widely encourage youth exchanges throughout the European Community.

The young people of today will be the Europe of tomorrow. The Community must not hesitate to invest in its young people, particularly as regards giving them the opportunity to meet each other. In the context of current efforts to encourage a European awareness and solidarity and to create a 'People's Europe', youth exchanges have a determining role to play. Moreover, such exchanges are directly bound up with the Community's economic, social and cultural objectives, whether it is a question of abolishing obstacles to the free movement of individuals or of preparing young people for their working lives. These exchanges within the European Community enable young people:

- To familiarize themselves with the socio-economic and cultural life in other member countries.
- To learn to communicate with people from different cultures.
- To become conscious of the interests which they share with young people in other countries.
- To perceive more clearly, and therefore strengthen, the European identity.

From the first years of the Community's existence, the European authorities have taken note of the importance of youth exchanges for the future of Europe. Since 1963, the programme has grown: currently 3 000 young workers between the ages of 18 and 28 annually receive grants to undertake a work placement period in another Community country. This programme, linked from the beginning with the principle of the free movement of workers, tried initially to conquer the natural reluctance of young people to move away from their local environment. Other objectives have since become predominant: improved vocational training, personal development of participants, encouragement of cross-border personal contacts, learning the realities of Europe, etc.

This exchange programme for young workers takes its place among the numerous Community initiatives for young people:

- Pilot projects intended to facilitate the transition between school and work.
- Activities intended to improve and modernize vocational training.
- Contributions from the European Social Fund, which devotes three quarters of its budget to vocational training and to recruitment premiums for young people under 25 years of age.

As regards exchanges, a major step still remained to be taken so that young people from all Member States and from all regions could meet with others from elsewhere in the Community, whether by incoming or outgoing youth exchanges. 'YES for Europe' should achieve this. Scheduled initially as a three-year programme (1988-90), it should be allocated a budget of 30 million ECU, and should enable up to 80 000 young people between the ages of 15 to 25 years to spend at least one week in another member country, having received the sort of preparation which will enable them to become immersed in the economic, social and cultural realities of the country visited. The programme's objectives are many:

- To increase significantly the number of youth exchanges throughout the entire Community.
- To redress the balance of exchanges in favour of disadvantaged regions.
- To improve the quality of exchanges by more effective preparation.
- To limit financial obstacles and to do away with legal and administrative barriers which often hinder the organization of exchanges.
- To structure permanent links between young people or groups of young people in different Member States.

It is envisaged that 80% of the programme's allocation will be devoted to the direct financing of youth exchanges. Administered by competent organizations designated by the individual Member States, the subsidized exchanges should as a priority:

- Bring together young people from differing social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

- Involve those Community regions in which youth exchanges are not well developed.
- Make young people more aware of the European dimension.
- In longer-term exchanges, priority is given to multilateral contacts intended to prepare or carry out a project of Community interest. Member States are required to guarantee that participating young people do not lose their social welfare entitlements.

In addition, the programme envisages:

- The financing of youth exchanges organized by European non-governmental organizations or which fall within the framework of vocational training schemes.
- Support for the promotional activities of national exchange coordination agencies.
- A range of complementary measures, such as the development of cooperation between coordination agencies, the organization of information and experience exchanges, the provision of European documentation, the elimination of legal and administrative obstacles to exchanges.

The 'YES for Europe' programme should therefore provide the necessary framework to give a new impetus to youth exchanges throughout the whole of the European Community. It must bring new blood to all the Community activities which favour young people and supplement measures already taken in the areas of education, vocational training and employment. In a time of massive youth unemployment, the credibility of the Community for large numbers of these young people will depend not only on the way in which it applies itself to resolving their immediate economic and social problems, but also on its commitment to young people as Europeans ■

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