Preparing for life
How the European Commission supported education, youth, culture and sport (2010-2014)
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We are giving people the tools that allow them to find their own path to employment, well-being and a place in society.

Androulla Vassiliou
European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth
When the new European Commission took office in February 2010, Europe was facing its deepest economic and financial crisis since the 1930s. Our most urgent task was to stabilise the euro and create a new regulatory framework for finance. But we had a duty to learn from the causes of the crisis, and respond with new policies for growth and jobs – this was the urgency that drove all of our work in education, youth and culture.

The Commission put education at the heart of its Europe 2020 strategy, and set the European Union two targets: to reduce the number of early school leavers from 14% in 2010 to below 10% by 2020; and to increase the number of young people completing higher education from 33% to 40%.

Education helps us to shape the world we want to live in. If we want a society that is open, fair and democratic, then surely that job begins in the classroom. Our schools and universities can help us to replenish our values and our sense of identity, and learn how to live with others. It is here that we prepare for a world of work that is changing more rapidly than ever before.

Education can restore our belief in the fair society – but only if we learn from the crisis. Many of Europe’s economies were neither sustainable nor inclusive: too few people shared in the benefits of a globalising economy; many saw their wages stagnate over the long term; and some became dependent on credit to maintain their standard of living. By reforming our education and training systems, we can exit the crisis and build something better for the future. By raising people’s skills, we can create more rewarding work, today and tomorrow.

**Erasmus+ opens a new chapter in the great story**

In 2014 we launched *Erasmus+*, giving four million people the opportunity to study, work, train and volunteer abroad between 2014 and 2020.

With a budget of almost €15 billion – a 40% increase on previous levels – the European Union’s programme for education, training and youth makes a new commitment to our young people. *Erasmus+* will equip them with the **skills** they need for a world that is increasingly mobile and multicultural.
By spending part of their studies or training in another country, young people learn to live and work with people from another culture. They learn a new language and a different way of thinking. They see the world through the eyes of someone else. They open their minds.

*Erasmus*+ supports all levels of education, from virtual platforms for school teachers to the particular needs of adult learners. It responds to the long-term political goals that our 28 countries have agreed at European level. We know we must tackle early school leaving as an urgent priority; therefore *Erasmus*+ will share the best solutions from across Europe. We have identified poor reading skills as a serious problem; *Erasmus*+ will fund new cross-border projects to improve them. Our learning of foreign languages is falling behind; *Erasmus*+ will help us to catch up. We need to open up education to new technologies; *Erasmus*+ will support better use of ICT for learners and teachers. Our vocational training systems are too often failing our young people; *Erasmus*+ will help to modernise them. Students wanting to study their Master’s degree abroad find it difficult to secure loans; *Erasmus*+ will provide a new loan guarantee.
Erasmus+ will help our education systems to build partnerships with the world of work so that young people develop the skills that new jobs demand. 125,000 schools, youth groups, higher-education institutions and enterprises will work together in partnerships across Europe. **150 Knowledge Alliances** will help 1,500 universities and businesses to develop new ways of teaching and learning, while **150 Sector Skills Alliances** will bring together 2,000 training institutes and businesses. And we have already launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, a business-education partnership to fight youth unemployment by improving the quality and supply of apprenticeships across Europe.

### Supporting our Member States’ education systems

The Commission offers research, analysis and political direction on some of the most urgent challenges facing our Member States’ education systems, and recommends targeted action to governments. Over the last five years we have deepened pan-European cooperation in higher education and vocational training, making it easier for students and teachers to compare courses and qualifications; created new tools for measuring progress and promoting transparency; extended cooperation with the OECD so that we better analyse education outcomes; and delivered policy strategies on **early childhood education and care**, **early school leaving**, **vocational training**, **rethinking skills** and **open education resources**.

We have paid special attention to **literacy** – where one in five young Europeans suffers reading difficulties – and launched a campaign, *Europe Loves Reading*, encouraging children to discover reading’s unique benefits. Our High-Level Group on Literacy recommended that parents encourage reading at home; ministries and schools should improve literacy training for teachers and give extra support to disadvantaged pupils and migrants; boys need special attention so they can catch up with girls; and digital tools should make teaching materials more attractive. A new pan-European network is now coordinating action and keeping these issues firmly on the political agenda.

For **multilingualism**, we funded cross-border networks and projects that promote national, regional and minority languages across Europe; while one of the strategic goals of Erasmus+ is to improve the teaching and learning of languages and to promote the Union’s linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness. The Commission’s translation and interpretation services reached the highest standards of professional excellence, ensuring that the European Union functions in all of its 24 official languages, and allowing citizens to use their own language when they communicate with our institutions.
Attracting talent in higher education

Universities around the world want to attract the best talent, and Europe is well-placed to succeed. But we want to make this a race to the top, not the bottom, so that every young person has a fair chance to succeed, whatever his or her background. We want to ensure fair and open access to higher education, and give special support to the underprivileged and those with special needs.

We have focused policy and funding on the reform of our universities, helping them to embrace new partnerships at home and abroad, and encouraging our students to prepare for a world of work that is more mobile than ever before.

Our High-Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education published a set of recommendations to university leaders and policy-makers. We wanted to underline the importance of quality in teaching: every institution should develop a strategy for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning, devoting the necessary level of human and financial resources to the task, and integrating this priority in its overall mission, giving teaching due parity with research. All staff teaching in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training, and a continuous upgrading of skills should become the norm for teachers in the higher-education sector.
We also launched a strategy for the internationalisation of European higher education. Our aim is to make Europe an attractive place to study while preparing European students to acquire the right skills for a globalising job market. Each university should design its own strategy and give special attention to mobility – which includes finding ways to offer equivalent opportunities to those students that stay in their home country.

To promote transparency and allow students and teachers to take informed decisions, we helped to create a new university ranking tool, U-Multirank. We believed that existing rankings focused heavily on research, reflecting neither the diversity of institutions nor the variety of their missions. Instead, by measuring performance against a broader set of criteria, including teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement, U-Multirank will offer a more rounded and fairer picture, helping students to find the right course and encouraging universities to focus on what they do best.
European Institute of Innovation and Technology: changing gear

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is a ground-breaking project that is changing the way we think about innovation in Europe, and this is why we deepened our investment in it. Having tested the concept during its early years, we were convinced of the EIT’s huge potential, and proposed a major increase to its budget.

In its first few years, the EIT created three cross-border partnerships between higher education and business – knowledge and innovation communities or KICs – to work on climate change, energy efficiency and ICT. These KICs helped to launch more than 100 start-ups, new products and services; and train more than 1,000 students in entirely new postgraduate courses combining scientific excellence and entrepreneurship. The EIT is helping the research and education communities to embrace a more entrepreneurial culture where creativity, self-confidence and risk are rewarded. We are coaching the innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

With a **new budget of €2.7 billion** for 2014-20, the EIT is now expanding and starting to fulfil its real potential. It will launch five new KICs while developing the existing three. They all have one goal in common: to transform cutting-edge education, research and innovation into new products and services on the market. Two of the new KICs will appear at the end of 2014, tackling the societal challenges of healthy ageing and raw materials; two more will be selected in 2016 to work on food supply and value-added manufacturing, and another in 2018 on urban mobility.

To complete our work in higher education, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** are making Europe an attractive place to do research. With a budget of more than €6 billion for 2014-20 – an increase of 30% – we can help 65,000 researchers to develop their careers by working abroad.
Empowering youth

Europe’s young people are facing an unprecedented political challenge. The economic crisis has not only driven unemployment to chronic levels in several countries; it has also raised difficult questions about the place of young people in society. While many of them are better informed and better connected than any previous generation, thanks in part to new social media, it is less clear whether our young people have the political voice to shape the society of tomorrow.

This Commission has given Europe’s youth organisations a new role in policy-making. We want to stimulate citizenship and ensure that European Union policy responds to the needs of our young people. Therefore, we launched a structured dialogue with youth across Europe, bringing together youth organisations, non-organised youth and policy-makers at national and European level to shape policy. The dialogue makes a difference: young people have brought their priorities to the Council of the European Union and set the agenda, and their proposals have led directly to new initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee and the Quality Framework for Traineeships.

Erasmus+ will give new visibility to the benefits of informal and non-formal learning, helping young people to acquire valuable skills outside the classroom. It will provide funding for youth exchanges, youth work and volunteering, teaching the values of civic participation and offering hands-on experience.
A new role for the cultural and creative industries

Europe has a rich cultural heritage and a limitless capacity for creativity. Our people produce the stories, sounds and images that fill pages, screens and concert halls the world over. Our challenge now is to build on these strengths, embrace the opportunities of the digital era, and find new ways to support creativity in Europe.

Over the last five years we have changed the way we talk about our cultural and creative industries. We have managed to strike a careful balance between, on the one hand, the intrinsic value of culture and its essential contribution to our identity and, on the other, the economic role of the cultural sector and its ability to create new jobs.

Europe’s artists, creators, designers and cultural leaders bring innovation to our society and economy. They account for nearly 4.5% of the European Union’s economic output and, thanks to almost one million mostly small firms, they provide jobs to over eight million people. Culture and the arts are the lifeblood of the digital world, and the appetite for creative content is insatiable. This Commission proposed the first-ever comprehensive strategy for the European cultural and creative sectors, establishing a policy space for creativity and backing it with new funding.
Creative Europe supports artists and creators

In 2014 we launched the Creative Europe programme with a budget of almost €1.5 billion, an increase of 9% on the previous period. The programme will support 250,000 European artists, 2,000 cinemas, 800 films and 4,500 book translations. It will enable our cultural and creative sectors to strengthen their international competitiveness, while sustaining our diversity.

Creative Europe will support cultural initiatives that promote cross-border cooperation, new platforms, networking and literary translation. In cinema, broadcasting and new media, it will fund the development and distribution of audiovisual works. A new cross-sectoral strand, open to all creative industries, will include a new Guarantee Facility that will make it easier for Europe’s cultural and creative operators to obtain bank loans. The new facility will make up to €750 million available and help financial institutions to better understand how these sectors work.
The Commission recognised the best European talent and achievement through its prestigious awards. The European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage celebrates the very best projects in this field. The European Border Breakers Awards recognise pop musicians who have taken their music to new audiences outside their home country. The European Union Prize for Literature promotes the circulation of new fiction across Europe, while the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture rewards the best new ideas and technologies.

Supporting the new creative economy goes hand-in-hand with a celebration of Europe’s cultural heritage. Our heritage is our memory, and it deepens our social capital, inspires our people and gives them new ways to take part in public life.

This Commission has tried to define Europe’s role in cultural heritage, and started a debate on how stakeholders should cooperate. Our new European Heritage Label is putting the spotlight on the places that embody our shared European history, educating future generations about our past and enriching our cultural tourism. And we have renewed the European Capitals of Culture, helping to brand our cities and regions through culture and stimulating new investment in our public infrastructure.
Building audiences for European film and broadcasting

Europe’s enduring strength in cinema and broadcasting would not be possible without the special relationship between creative minds, an entrepreneurial spirit and public funding. The success of this model has not only maintained our dazzling mosaic of film and television culture but ensured that our work reaches a global audience. Even as our audiovisual media digitise and globalise, the case for public support is as clear and as necessary as ever. The diversity, quality and independence of publicly-funded content is a European value that we all share, and this Commission was proud to defend it.

This Commission strengthened the European Union’s tools to help our film-makers and producers. First, we increased our traditional support to the audiovisual industry through the MEDIA arm of Creative Europe. We will help the distribution of European film and encourage the co-productions that are so successful at finding new audiences across our borders. We will fund the training of industry professionals, and help them to develop business contacts across the globe. And we will continue to support independent cinemas that show European film.

Second, we adapted our audiovisual policy to digitisation, the globalisation of markets, the challenges of finance, and the convergence of media and artistic disciplines. Above all, we managed to strike a balance between promoting cultural diversity for its own sake and helping to professionalise the sector. We made the case for the cultural exception in international trade, and reformed the state-aid rules for cinema so that public funding can nurture a thriving industry in cities and regions across Europe.
Defining Europe’s place in the world

Culture shapes Europe’s relations with our neighbours and the rest of the world. Europe’s ‘soft power’ in the 21st century is less about projecting a single cultural vision of what Europe represents than about bringing our values – how we celebrate our diversity and shared heritage in equal measure – to the global stage, and engaging our partners in debate. Europe’s openness, both among its own nations and communities and towards the rest of the world, shapes our thinking here. We commissioned a major report on the role of culture in the European Union’s external relations, which will guide our action in the years to come.

In this spirit we launched a High-Level People-to-People Dialogue with China, recognising that only by spending time and working together will our peoples develop a deeper mutual understanding.

The Dialogue has become the third pillar in the European Union’s strategic partnership with China, and it sits on an equal footing with the strategic and economic pillars. The Dialogue expands our cooperation and exchanges, helping students, teachers, artists and cultural professionals to work together on common projects. Since its launch in 2012, the Dialogue has already created a new platform where universities discuss the challenges of higher education; organised a Year of Youth and a Year of Intercultural Dialogue as well as several European Film Festivals in China; promoted language-learning on both sides; and organised exchanges of civil servants so that we better understand each other’s systems of governance.
Developing sport’s social value

Sport is a vital part of European society. This Commission focused on three priorities: the integrity of sport, its economic aspects and its social role. We brought policy-makers and stakeholders together to tackle trans-national challenges and share best practice.

Sport plays a unique role in the lives of millions of Europeans, keeping them fit, socially active and engaged in a local community. For the first time in the European Union’s history, grassroots sport will now receive funding from the Union’s budget. Erasmus+ will help the sports movement to maximise the impact of sport on issues such as health, social inclusion, gender equality and dual careers for athletes. It will also tackle cross-border threats such as doping and match-fixing, and help to improve governance.

Sport’s ability to nurture its grassroots depends partly on the popularity and success of European professional sports, which traditionally invest part of their revenues in education and infrastructure. This Commission has developed good working relations with Europe’s governing bodies and stakeholders, encouraging policies that bring stability, legal certainty and financial sustainability to clubs and competitions.

We created a European Week of Sport, which will take place for the first time in 2015 and highlight the value of sport and physical activity for the individual, for our health, for society and the economy. Responding to the growing threat of obesity and poor health resulting from our increasingly sedentary lifestyle, we developed the first ever Council Recommendation in the field of sport, on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity.
A Europe open to the world

As the European Union searches for a new narrative – a new story that explains why the Union’s members need each other more than ever before – we sense that our common destiny goes beyond a currency and the economic integration it demands. Our starting point, surely, must be Europe’s place in the world. What does it mean to be European today, and how do we see our role on the world stage?

Education and culture provide some of the answers. They have been Europe’s great strength for centuries, and our duty now is to help our young people develop those assets in a new world. This Commission has greatly increased the funding for Erasmus+, the EIT, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Creative Europe, demonstrating a renewed commitment to our young people, our teachers, our schools and universities, and to our artists, creators and innovators.

In all that we do, we are working for a Europe that learns to live together. A Europe that is prepared for a mobile and multicultural world. A Europe that sees diversity not as a threat but as a strength. A Europe that is open among its neighbours and open to the world.
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