

Decision concerning the European Commission's non-extension of a project funded under the Erasmus+ programme (case 626/2021/AMF)

Decision

Case 626/2021/AMF - **Opened on** 14/04/2021 - **Decision on** 26/07/2021 - **Institution concerned** European Commission (No maladministration found) |

Dear Mr X,

On 29 March 2021, you submitted a complaint to the European Ombudsman against the European Commission concerning the above issue.

According to the information provided in your complaint, you were granted a 7-day university exchange in the context of a 2018 mobility project funded under the Erasmus+ programme [1] . The exchange was supposed to happen in 2020, but it did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission already extended the project until 31 July 2021. You argue, however, that the extension is not sufficient.

You are concerned that, if the Commission does not extend the project further, you will not be able to carry out the exchange due to the still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. You therefore want the Commission to grant a further extension of the project.

We contacted the Commission to seek information on the matter. The Commission replied that, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has aimed at offering flexibility in mobility projects by extending them as much as possible. This is why the 2018 Erasmus+ project under which your exchange was to be funded was already extended for 12 months.

The Commission said that it has made a careful analysis of the operational, legal and financial impact that a further extension would entail. The Commission found that an additional extension of the 2018 projects would seriously affect the implementation and management of the Erasmus+ programme, for the following reasons.

In summary, to ensure equal treatment of all beneficiaries [2] , the Commission would have to apply the same extension to other types of projects and programmes, which would mean that contractual documents have to be individually amended and IT tools have to be



redesigned. The Commission would thus have to re-deploy resources currently fully employed in the launch of the new 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme. The overlap of new and old projects would jeopardize the achievement of the objectives and targets of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme. It would mean a significant increase in workload and administrative burden for the National Agencies, which would therefore have a reduced capacity to follow up on the activities linked to the launch of the new programme. In addition, there would be an increased risk of bankruptcy for beneficiaries, due to further postponement of the final payments.

The Commission has also pointed out that the National Agencies are aware that, as part of the measures put in place to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also possible to carry out Erasmus+ exchanges through virtual mobility, particularly for short-term exchanges such as in this case.

We find that the Commission has taken into account the circumstances and challenges caused by the COVID 19 pandemic by allowing the 2018 projects to be extended beyond their original duration and by allowing virtual mobility. We also find that the Commission has provided a detailed explanation as to why a further extension would not be proportionate given the disadvantages. We consider the Commission's position to be reasonable.

Based on the above, we have decided to close the inquiry with the following conclusion [3] :

There was no maladministration by the European Commission

We understand that this is not the solution you expected but we hope nevertheless that you will find these explanations helpful.

We attach, for your information, a copy of the reply received from the Commission in the context of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Tina Nilsson

Head of the Case-handling Unit

Strasbourg, 27/07/2021

Enclosure: Commission's reply in case 626/2021/AMF



[1] Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The 2021-2017 programme has an estimated budget of €26.2 billion. For more information, see here: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en

[2] In line with Articles 188(a) and 201 of the EU Financial Regulation, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>

[3] Full information on the procedure and rights pertaining to complaints can be found at <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/document/70707>