

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries (Erasmus World) (2004-2008)

(2002/C 331 E/05)

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EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. INTRODUCTION

The present proposal is based on article 149 of the Treaty, which stipulates that the 'The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries ...' with a view to contributing to the development of quality education in Europe.

This provision must be interpreted against the background of a number of developments. The first is the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 24 March 2000, which underlined the fact that the European Union has been confronted by and must respond to a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of the new knowledge-driven economy.

In such an era of globalisation and interdependence, the response of the Member States and of the European Community to emerging needs in higher education cannot be confined only to the geographical limits of the European Union or the wider Europe.

Second, the Ministers of Education of the Member States, and the Ministers of Education from fourteen other European countries, identified in the Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999) that it is necessary to ensure that Europe's higher education sector acquires a degree of attractiveness in the wider world equal to Europe's major cultural and scientific achievements.

The European Ministers in charge of higher education meeting in Prague (19 May 2001), *inter alia*, further emphasised the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the world.

Moreover, the potential of higher education institutions to contribute to the development of a Europe of knowledge should be further exploited in view of the synergies between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

Third, the present proposal takes into account political developments at international level. In particular, it takes into account the Conclusions of the G8 Education Ministers Summit in Tokyo in March 2000, which encouraged nations to collaborate further in their quest for responses to emerging education challenges and pays due regard to the Conclusions of the G8 Heads of State Summit held in Kananaskis in June 2002, which adopted the New Partnership for African Development. The proposal also takes into account policies being adopted by major players elsewhere in response to the globalisation of higher education, such as the United States of America, Canada and Australia.

The proposal follows on from the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education, adopted on 18.7.2001 (COM(2001) 385).

Like the Communication, the proposal reflects, *inter alia*, the results of a study carried out by the Academic Cooperation Association under the title 'The Globalisation of Education and Training: Recommendations for a coherent response from the European Union' ⁽¹⁾ between February and May 2000.

⁽¹⁾ Dr. Sybille Reicherts, Bernd Wächter, <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/ec-usa/usa.html>

The proposal builds on the debates held and the conclusions adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. The deliberations revealed broad agreements with the analysis set out in the Communications on the general objectives that the European Community should pursue in undertaking cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education and on the need for a new Community instrument to achieve them.

The proposal should also be seen against the backdrop of the Commission's recent Communication 'A project for the European Union' ⁽¹⁾, the Commission's initial overall contribution to the debate on the Future of Europe, which identifies education as being among those policies which encourage the competitiveness of our economies and businesses and which need to be developed in order to strengthen a knowledge-based Europe.

Parallel to the institutional discussions, the Commission organised a series of bilateral discussion meetings with a sample of major organisations actively involved in international education outreach activities in the Member States (the British Council, DAAD, EduFrance and ACA). The purpose of these meetings was to discuss and test the validity of specific lines of action suggested in the Communication (such as the possible form of a European higher education offer and ways to promote European higher education world-wide). These discussions helped in determining the choice of measures contained in the proposal.

In the light of the above, the Commission produced an operational paper which, on the basis of the objectives already identified, described in detail the delivery mechanisms and outputs through which those objectives could be achieved. The paper was put to a panel of external higher education experts, which confirmed the validity of the approach and provided valuable advice on certain specific aspects of the proposed delivery mechanism.

Finally, the preparation of the present initiative took place against the backdrop of the renewed impetus given by the European Commission to the dialogue between peoples and cultures placing it among high political priorities, and the recognition of the potential of cooperation in higher education in promoting understanding and tolerance.

2. CHALLENGES AND NEEDS EMERGING FROM THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is subject to a phenomenon of growing internationalisation ⁽²⁾ as a response to the process of globalisation ⁽³⁾. Article 149 of the Treaty stipulates, in its third paragraph, that 'The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries ...' with a view to contributing to the development of quality education in Europe. In developing its higher education systems the Community must therefore seek to prepare its citizens and its workforce for a global environment by including the international dimension in an appropriate and effective way.

Community programmes in education, particularly Erasmus, have had a substantial impact in boosting the capacity for international cooperation among European universities. However, the competitive advantages gained by European universities through their involvement in Erasmus, such as the experience in questions of recognition of study abroad periods, mutual transparency of widely differing systems of education, teaching staff mobility and joint curriculum development are not yet fully exploited.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2002) 247 final, 22.5.2002.

⁽²⁾ 'The process of systematic integration of an international dimension into the teaching, research and public service function of a higher education institution', Wächter, 1999.

⁽³⁾ The forceful changes in the economic, social, political and cultural environment brought about by global competition, the integration of markets, increasingly dense communication networks, information flows and mobility, Van Damme, 1999.

While the European Community focuses particularly on the needs of European citizens and European higher education systems, it is clear that there is similar awareness around the world concerning the challenges of globalisation. The number of free moving students seeking an international education today is greater than ever ⁽¹⁾. Europe's comparative advantages can be exploited to respond to the needs of students from third countries seeking specialised or advanced courses lacking in the country concerned.

Today, the majority of international exchange students go mainly to the US (547 867 international students in 2000/2001 ⁽²⁾). In Europe, there is a clear imbalance in the flow of international students: over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the approximately 400 000 students from non-European countries studying in the EC go to the UK, France and Germany ⁽³⁾. European higher education institutions have so far failed to combine individual strengths, educational diversity and wide experience in networking to offer courses unique to Europe and of world class and which would enable the benefits of international mobility simultaneously to be maximised and shared more widely within the EC and partner countries.

Higher education plays a critical role in boosting innovation, economic growth, employment growth and productivity. Its potential positive impact can be further reinforced if it provides labour market access to highly skilled, mobile human capital.

If European higher education is to remain at the leading edge of developments, institutions should seek to establish cooperation with third-country institutions that have achieved a level of development comparable to that of EC institutions. Many third countries see potential benefits in systematic cooperation with European higher education institutions, especially within multilateral networks involving institutions from more than one Member State. Such cooperation enhances the value of bilateral education arrangements with individual Member States. This is the reason why in almost all agreements between the EC and third countries, education is mentioned as a field for potential cooperation. Every country needs its best-educated people to have some international expertise.

Europe's status as a centre of excellence in learning is not always appreciated or understood by third country universities, nor by students looking for an international education. One of the reasons behind this situation is the lack of a European higher education identity. Another factor is the lack of transparency of quality assurance procedures. Increasing the attractiveness of our universities requires an assurance of quality that is widely understood in the world.

From another angle, Europe's political and commercial success in the world is dependent on future decision-makers in third countries having a better understanding of, and closer ties with, Europe.

In the aftermath of World War II, US Senator J. William Fulbright realised the importance of academic exchanges as a means of improving mutual understanding between peoples. More than fifty years later the Fulbright Programme has proved its worth as the USA's flagship programme of international education and intercultural dialogue. The Fulbright Programme has also contributed enormously to reinforcing the attractiveness of higher education in the USA for students and scholars from all over the world. In addition, it has helped enhance the quality of higher education in the USA, and has stimulated individual American universities into developing ever better and stronger international services and outreach and into becoming more attractive overall to foreign students.

⁽¹⁾ The number of foreign students in OECD countries was 1,41 million in 1999, up from 1,3 million in 1998 (source: OECD Trade in Educational Services: Trends and Emerging Issues, Kurt Larsen, John P. Martin, and Rosemary Morris, May 2002 Revised Version). In 2000/2001 there were 547 867 foreign students in the US; this figure represents an increase of 6,4 % in relation to the previous academic year. This annual increase is the largest since 1980.

⁽²⁾ Source: Opendoors (<http://www.opendoorsweb.org/>).

⁽³⁾ Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1998, chapter 3.14: 'Education at the third level: foreign students by country of origin, in the 50 major host countries'.

Many of the issues arising from internationalisation of higher education may best be addressed at national level (stimulating pro-active internationalisation amongst individual universities, including development of student services, promotional action, internationally oriented curricula, etc.) or at intergovernmental level (convergence of degree structures, more transparent quality assurance mechanisms). Some issues can be addressed in the context of existing Community programmes and actions (such as Socrates/Erasmus) or through new instruments other than the present proposal (such as issues regarding the conditions of admission of third country nationals for purposes of study).

The purpose of the present proposal is to complement efforts at national and intergovernmental level and to be effective only in those areas where specific needs so require. From the analysis above, it follows that the European Community intervention may be effective in confronting and resolving:

- the difficulty in exploiting the comparative advantages of European universities in developing a genuine and attractive higher education offer, particularly at postgraduate level for both education and research, by providing support to European universities' collaborative efforts in this respect;
- the lack of a clearly discernible European identity for higher education, by supporting the development of a European higher education profile;
- the absence of 'flagship products', such as double degrees at postgraduate level in spite of a long tradition of multilateral networking and cooperation, by creating a Community label for joint, high quality postgraduate courses;
- the growing imbalance in the incoming flow of third country students, who go mainly to a small number of Member States, by encouraging collaboration among higher education institutions from these and other Member States and by establishing a European Community scholarship scheme;
- the tendency amongst the brightest post-graduate students and scholars in search of an international education and experience to the US; the risk for Europe's political and commercial success in the world caused by a lack of understanding of, and ties with, Europe among future decision-makers in third countries and the danger of losing comparative advantages in higher education due to Europe's diminishing attractiveness for first class scholars, by establishing a European Community scholarship scheme aimed at attracting the best and the brightest among third country postgraduate students seeking an international education;
- the risk of widening the gap in intercultural understanding between European and other cultures, by promoting exchanges of students and scholars between Europe and the rest of the world;
- the insufficient development of structural schemes to encourage bridges between European networks and third country higher education excellence and European student and scholar outward mobility as part of a European *cursus*, by supporting structured cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe and third countries;
- the absence of coordinated action at Community level to promote European attractiveness, as well as, *inter alia*, of mechanisms to ensure international cooperation with regard to quality assurance and student services and, therefore, risks for students as consumers of international mobility products, by encouraging cooperation between organisations competent and/or active in these fields.

The absence of Community intervention would result in the persistence, in the longer term, and the probable aggravation of these needs.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMISSION PROPOSAL

3.1. General objectives

The programme's overall aim is to contribute to quality education in the European Union, in particular by fostering cooperation with third countries. The long-term impact sought by the present proposal is, firstly, to better prepare citizens in Europe, but also in partner third countries, to live and work in a global, knowledge-based society. The proposal seeks, secondly, to ensure Europe's position as a pole of excellence in higher education and, therefore, to ensure that higher education in Europe becomes an increasingly more attractive destination world-wide. Thirdly, through people-to-people exchanges and structural cooperation concentrating on young people with a potential for future leadership roles within the economy and society, the proposal seeks to improve mutual understanding between peoples and cultures, thus contributing to world peace and stability, and to Europe's legitimate aspirations as a major player on the international scene. In pursuing these objectives the Community will also seek to improve links between higher education institutions and industry.

3.2. Specific objectives

In order to achieve these general objectives, the direct and short-term effects sought by the programme can be grouped as follows:

- the emergence of a distinctly European offer in higher education which would be attractive both within the European Union and beyond its borders;
- a higher profile for, visibility of and improved accessibility to European education;
- a greater world-wide interest in and more concrete possibilities for acquiring European qualifications and/or experience among highly-qualified graduates and scholars from all over the world;
- more structured cooperation between European Community and third country institutions and greater outgoing European Union mobility as part of European study programmes.

3.3. Operational objectives

The Community, through calls for proposals launched in the framework of the programme, will provide financial support with a view to generating:

- European Union Masters Courses (selected for a five-year period, subject to a light-weight annual renewal procedure based on progress reporting), involving at least three higher education institutions from three different Member States and leading to double/multiple degrees.

Concentrating on the post-graduate level is a deliberate operational choice that can be justified for the following main reasons:

- (a) factors such as, *inter alia*, the structure of degrees, complexity of curricula and the use of language; undergraduate studies would allow much less flexibility than post-graduate level courses for developing European 'flagship' products, i.e., European joint programmes leading to double degrees;
- (b) the Community could not support significant numbers of third country students for a three to six year period of undergraduate study, whereas the duration of study at Masters level does allow the development of a strong international projection including Community-sponsored student mobility;

- (c) the value-added of Community intervention could be maximal at post-graduate level (Masters) since it would contribute to the development of the degree structure favoured by the Bologna/Prague process, a key element of which is the establishment of a first degree, Masters degree, and doctorate cycle;
 - (d) international mobility is proportionately higher at postgraduate (Masters) level than at undergraduate level;
 - (e) in practical terms, working with students at post-graduate level provides an insurance against failure as the student has proved during undergraduate study his or her abilities.
- Scholarships for third country graduate students selected to enrol for a full study period (on average fifteen months) in European Union Masters Courses.
 - Scholarships for third country visiting scholars for teaching and scholarly assignments (average three months) connected with European Union Masters Courses.
 - Partnerships (up to three years) between European Union Masters Courses and third country higher education universities, including European Union student and staff outgoing mobility.
 - Studies, conferences, seminars, publications, joint development of marketing actions, joint development of web-based and other tools to support international education and student mobility.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme's overall and specific objectives would be achieved through the following actions:

- (A) European Union Masters Courses
- (B) Scholarships
- (C) Partnerships with third country higher education institutions
- (D) Enhancing attractiveness
- (E) Support measures

The programme must be seen as an internal policy instrument and therefore the actions above will be funded from Chapter Three of the Community Budget.

4.1. European Union Masters Courses

The specific purpose of this action would be to identify and distinguish (through a European label) a pool of host European postgraduate (Masters) courses with a view to reinforcing the attractiveness and visibility of European education, encouraging European universities to jointly exploit their comparative advantages. Although the medium- to longer-term aim of the programme is clearly to encourage the creation of new postgraduate courses, in its initial stages this action would be open to existing as well as new networks set up for the purpose of the programme.

For the purpose of this programme, European Union Masters Courses shall:

- (a) involve as a rule a minimum of three higher education institutions from three different Member States;

- (b) implement a study programme which involves a period of study in at least two of the three institutions under (a);
- (c) have built-in mechanisms for the recognition of periods of study undertaken in partner institutions in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System;
- (d) result in the awarding of double or multiple recognised or accredited degrees from the participating institutions;
- (e) reserve a minimum of places for, and host, third country students who have been granted financial support under this programme;
- (f) establish transparent conditions for admissions, which pay due regard, inter alia, to gender issues and equity issues;
- (g) agree to respect the rules applicable to the selection procedure of grantees (students and scholars);
- (h) put in place adequate arrangements to facilitate access for, and hosting of, third country students (information facilities, accommodation, etc.);
- (i) provide, as appropriate, for students' language preparation and assistance.

European postgraduate courses will be granted the protected label of 'European Union Masters Courses' through a rigorous selection process ⁽¹⁾.

It should be noted that in European education systems today, the word 'Masters' is used to refer to higher education courses and programmes whose configuration and relation to the official degree structure varies considerably from country to country. In selecting European Union Masters Courses, the programme should acknowledge and reflect this variety. However the programme should endeavour to encourage greater convergence and transparency in postgraduate qualifications structures along the lines of the Bologna/Prague processes ⁽²⁾.

European Union Masters Courses will be delivered within the territory of the European Union Member States and of the countries participating in the programme (EEA EFTA States and countries candidate for accession to the European Union in accordance with the relevant provisions of the instruments governing the relations between the European Community and these countries). There will be no conditions regarding the language(s) in which the courses will be delivered.

The selection of European Union Masters Courses will be carried out by a High Level Selection Board chaired by the Commission. The Selection Board should ensure that only courses responding to the highest academic standards and adhering strictly to the principles and criteria set up for the purpose of this programme would be selected. In this context, the selection process could involve consultation with accreditation bodies and/or competent national authorities. While the primary criterion for selection will be quality, the Commission shall seek to ensure a balanced geographical representation of Member States in labelled European Union Master Courses. The selection of European Union Master Courses will pay due regard to the existence of poles of university excellence in less advantaged European Union regions, with a view to reinforcing universities' economic, social and cultural influence in these regions.

In order to ensure continuity and stability in the system, European Union Masters Courses will be selected for a five-year period (subject to a light-weight annual renewal procedure based on progress reporting), which period could include a year's preparatory activities before the actual course begins to run. Funding would be subject to the annual renewal procedure; but a desire for and commitment to continuity would be made clear after first year selection. At cruising speed, an estimated number of 20 new European Union Masters Courses would be labelled each year.

⁽¹⁾ The Jean Monnet Action provides a good example of such a label and rigorous selection process.

⁽²⁾ As far as possible, the framework programme would seek to build on the European Masters initiative piloted during the academic year 2002-2003 under Socrates-Erasmus (Bologna process) as this evolves.

4.2. Scholarships

The Community will establish a single, global scholarship scheme linked to European Union Masters Courses and targeted at the best qualified third country graduate students and scholars.

The development of a single scheme will ensure maximum visibility. Scholarships will be open to nationals from third countries other than those participating in this programme under Article 12 ⁽¹⁾ of the decision, who have already obtained a first higher education degree, who are not residents of any of the Member States or the participating countries, who may not have carried out his or her main activity (studies, work, etc.) for more than a total of 12 months over the last five years in any of the Member States or the participating countries, without any precondition for participation other than the existence of relations between the European Union and the country of origin of the students and scholars in question. Participation of women and less-advantaged students from these countries will be encouraged.

Participating institutions in the European Union Masters Courses and other hosting universities will be strongly encouraged to make provision in their application and selection processes to avoid or discourage brain drain from less developed countries.

4.2.1. Global Student Scheme

At present, there is no open, global European Community scheme targeting graduate student mobility beyond the possibilities offered by the fifth framework programme for research. A certain degree of mobility exists within regional or bilateral cooperation programmes (such as Tempus, Alfa, AlBan and Asia-Link). But, by virtue of their specificity, grants for mobility are only granted within institutional frameworks that enhance partnership, ownership and know-how sharing with a view to promoting structured and sustainable cooperation between regions.

The proposed global scheme for graduate students will support longer-term stays (as proposed in the Communication) for up to two academic years (20 months).

Scholarships will be linked to a specific European postgraduate offer, as established above, and, therefore, it will have a guaranteed European added value and hence contribute to enhancing the quality of education in Europe.

The list of labelled European Union Masters Courses would be disseminated world-wide (Internet). Students who fulfil the criteria set out in the second paragraph under 4.2 would be eligible. They would be invited to apply directly to these Courses.

Each European Union Masters Course would determine the precise academic conditions for admission. Students applying for a scholarship would have to be able to show acceptance in principle by a European Union Masters Course in order to be eligible for the scholarship. European Union Masters Courses would set up joint selection panels to ensure even distribution of students between the institutions involved. They would communicate the pre-selection list to the Commission.

Selection will be carried out by a Selection Board, chaired by the Commission. The Selection Board will ensure appropriate balance across European Union Masters Courses, fields of study, students' regions of provenance and will encourage participation of women and less-advantaged students from third countries. To this end and to a limited extent, the Board may redirect student flows if necessary.

Financial support will be provided for up to two academic years. The average duration of a European Union Masters Course is estimated at 15 months. The scheme would aim at a cruising speed of over 2 000 scholarships.

⁽¹⁾ Participation of EEA EFTA States, and candidate countries for accession to the European Community.

4.2.2. *Visiting Scholar Scheme*

The Community will provide support to third country scholars (third country nationals with outstanding academic and/or professional experience) visiting the European Union Masters Courses, with a view to carrying out teaching and research assignments and scholarly work in the institutions participating in European Union Masters Courses.

As a complement to the student scheme, and in order to reinforce the international dimension of the programme, European Union Masters Courses would be encouraged to involve world class scholars in their activities. To this end grants would be provided to scholars visiting the European Union Masters Courses, with a view to carrying out teaching and research assignments as well as scholarly work.

These activities will be primarily connected to or related with the content of the European Union Masters Course, however institutions participating in a European Union Masters Course should be encouraged to profit from the presence of the visiting scholars during the academic year.

Each European Union Masters Course may host three visiting scholars per academic year. The grant period would be on average three months.

The selection process would be identical to that proposed for the Graduate Student Scheme.

The scheme could support up to 480 scholars per year by 2008.

4.3. **Partnerships with third country higher education institutions**

Partnerships with third country higher education institutions are designed to open up European higher education and reinforce its presence in the world. It will do this through the creation of structured relations between institutions. By encouraging mutual dialogue and agreement on issues like mutual recognition and accreditation, such structured relations will create enduring bridges for cultural and educational exchanges and serve as blueprints for the implementation of education clauses in association agreements, political declarations or action plans.

Contrary to the approach adopted for external cooperation programmes, partnerships are an added opportunity and not a requirement for European Union Masters Courses. Partnerships with top third country higher education institutions would enhance the attractiveness of European Union Masters Courses and should contribute to the Courses' learning objectives.

In this context, partnerships would provide the framework for outgoing mobility of European Union students and scholars involved in the European Union Masters Courses.

The Commission will give priority to countries with highly developed higher education sectors and/or institutions sufficiently well-developed to be able to cooperate on an equal footing.

Partnerships will have the following basic characteristics:

- the European Community would provide support for European Union Masters Courses to establish cooperation with third country institutions;
- this cooperation would take the form of partnership projects, based on cooperation between European Union Masters Courses and third country institutions;
- partnership projects would be established for periods of up to three years;
- a European Union Masters Course could have partner institutions in more than one third country;

- a partnership project would provide a framework for outgoing mobility; such outgoing mobility would primarily consist of students enrolled in the European Union Masters Courses and the Courses' teachers;
- to be eligible for such outward mobility, students and scholars would have to have been European Union citizens, or third country nationals who had been legal residents in the European Union for at least three years (and for purposes other than study) before the start of the outgoing mobility;
- study periods at the host (i.e., non-European) institution would be regarded as an integral part of the degree requirements at the sending institution, which would entail prior agreement on credit recognition; as a rule, study periods would have a minimum duration of one month and a maximum of six months.

Partnership project activities could also include:

- teaching assignments at a partner institution supporting the project's curriculum development;
- exchanges of teachers, trainers, administrators, and other relevant specialists;
- development and dissemination of new methodologies in higher education, including the use of information and communication technologies, e-learning, and open and distance learning;
- development of cooperation schemes with third country universities with a view to offering a course in the country in question.

European Union Masters Courses applying for a third country partnership would receive a block allocation per third country partner institution up to a certain maximum. European Union Masters Courses could enjoy partnerships in different third countries. Limitations might be imposed on the number of institutions from one specific third country.

They would also receive support for European Union student mobility. It could be envisaged that up to five students per institution participating in a European Union Masters Course per year would get support for studying at a third country partner university. Students should spend a minimum of one month and a maximum of six months at a third country institution.

Teachers and staff involved in European Union Masters Courses would be granted support for up to three months for teaching or research assignments linked to Course activities. The number of grantees per year would be calculated on the assumption that each institution participating in a European Union Masters Course activity would send one European Union scholar per year.

Selection of partnerships would be carried out through procedures similar to those applicable to European Union Masters Courses and scholarships. European Union grantees would be selected by institutions. The list of participants would receive Commission approval.

4.4. Enhancing attractiveness

Through this action, the Community will support activities aimed at enhancing the profile and visibility of, and accessibility to, European education. The Community will also support complementary activities that contribute to the objectives of this programme.

Eligible institutions would be public or private organisations dealing with issues pertaining to the provision of higher education at international level. Activities shall be conducted within networks involving a minimum of three organisations from three different Member States and may involve organisations from third countries. Activities (which may include seminars, conferences, workshops, development of ICT tools, production of material for publication, etc.) may take place in the Member States or in third countries.

The programme may support the involvement of third country organisations but on a pilot project basis. The involvement on a long-term, structural basis of organisations from third countries in complementary activities would be possible only within the context of bilateral arrangements.

4.4.1. *Support for joint promotional actions*

The Community will provide support to higher education institutions and public non-profit making organisations working towards the promotion of European higher education abroad.

Eligible activities may include:

- development of general written or visual common information and dissemination tools contributing towards a better understanding of the value of study in Europe;
- joint representation of European higher education and European Union Masters Courses at international fairs and other events;
- seminars, workshops and other means with a view to co-ordinating information and dissemination efforts;
- activities targeting geographical areas having a significant potential in terms of international student mobility.

Promotional activities shall seek to establish links between higher education and research, and exploit whenever possible potential synergies, in particular with the Marie Curie Fellowship Schemes, Jean Monnet Action and with the European Union Centres in third countries.

Activities under 4.4.1 would not cover the promotion of the framework programme itself, as these would be covered by technical support measures.

4.4.2. *Support for services facilitating access of third country students to European education*

The European Community will support collaborative activities aimed at facilitating access to, and encouraging study in, Europe.

Eligible activities may include:

- joint development of pedagogic tools for language training and cultural preparation;
- development of joint distance education modules targeting third country students;
- services facilitating mobility between university partnerships within and outside European Union Masters Courses as defined above;
- services facilitating international mobility of students with children and other dependent people;
- further development of an internet gateway to facilitate access to European Union Masters Courses as well as to other European courses suitable for third country students.

Harmonisation of the conditions of admission and residence for third country nationals for study purposes is one of the key aspects to encouraging study in the European Union. The European Commission is currently working on a possible directive on this subject.

4.4.3. *Complementary activities*

The Community will support complementary activities dealing with issues crucial to the internationalisation of higher education such as:

- quality assurance, including accreditation or other types of quality labels or specifications;

- credit recognition;
- recognition of European qualifications abroad and mutual recognition of qualifications with third countries;
- evolving curriculum development needs in a world-wide perspective;
- changes in society and in education systems in a world-wide perspective;
- safety and health for exchange students;
- consumer protection issues linked to international education;
- surveys and studies (for example on the decision-making process of foreign students seeking study abroad, on obstacles to study in Europe).

Eligible institutions would be higher education institutions and organisations dealing with issues pertaining to the provision of higher education and in particular those indicated above. Activities supported under this programme would be complementary to those undertaken in relation with intra-European Community cooperation (e.g., through the Socrates-Erasmus programme or the Bologna/Prague process).

Activities would include: seminars, conferences, workshops, production of material for publication, and could both take place in, and involve organisations from, third countries.

The programme would support the involvement of third country organisations only on a pilot project basis. The involvement of a long-term, structural basis of organisations from third countries in complementary activities would be possible only within the context of a bilateral agreement.

This action may support projects initiatives undertaken by thematic networks, including the setting up of associations in countries/regions where they do not yet exist and the pursuance of specific objectives through joint projects (on issues such as curriculum development, needs of society and quality assurance). Where a bilateral agreement already existed, thematic networks could facilitate the development of Masters and PhDs by groupings of institutions and contribute, through horizontal action, towards the structural strengthening of cooperation with third countries. In supporting these types of activities, the Community will endeavour to develop synergies with networks in the field of research, such as the Marie Curie Early Stage Actions.

The Community may support pilot projects with third countries with a view to developing further cooperation in the field of higher education with the countries in question. Under this action, the Community may provide, on a pilot basis, scholarships to third country students seeking a postgraduate degree from a European university or consortium of universities where no other Community action provides for such financial support at higher education level and where complementarity with bilateral schemes at Member State level can be ensured.

The Community may support an Alumni Association of all students (third country and Europeans) graduating from European Union Masters Courses.

In cooperation with Member States and with due regard to the role of the Committee established for the purpose of this programme, the Commission will establish a high level scientific group open to recognised intellectuals from all over the world whose role will be to advise on the academic development and other relevant aspects of the programme.

4.5. Technical support measures

In carrying out the programme, the Commission will pay due regard to the guiding principles of simplification, subsidiarity and economies of scale. It will seek wherever possible to foster cooperation and synergies with existing structures concerned with higher education links with third countries in Member States. Therefore, whilst the Commission will necessarily have recourse to a central executive agency in order to ensure adequate support across the European Union and the European dimension of the programme, it will seek to ensure that the agency cooperates with, and makes maximum use of, those structures and agencies already existing in the Member States.

5. JUSTIFICATION OF THE NEED FOR A NEW COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME

5.1. The recourse to a Community action programme versus non-intervention and/or regulatory approach

Article 149 of the EC Treaty limits Community intervention in the field of education to supporting and complementing Member States' action, and proscribes legislative harmonisation. It could be argued that the Commission could achieve the objectives identified in the programme exclusively by encouraging inter-governmental cooperation and promoting dialogue between education authorities instead of resorting to a financial assistance programme. Non binding legal instruments, such as Recommendations, may serve to buttress this dialogue. However, as has been argued above, certain needs and shortcomings persist despite on-going intergovernmental cooperation and despite the ever present possibility of having recourse to non-binding legal instruments.

The lack of Community intervention would prolong the persistence of such needs and shortcomings and possibly might aggravate them over time. The alternative is a Community programme that, through the classic competitive mechanism of calls for proposals and targeted financial support, would provide incentives for change and speed up processes.

This approach does not exclude but rather encourages, concurrent, complementary activities to be taken outside the programme. A good example of this is the work currently under way within the Commission to harmonise the conditions of entry of third country nationals for reasons of study. This regulatory process may enhance Europe's attractiveness and facilitate inflows of third country students. Similarly, the intergovernmental Bologna/Prague process will have very positive effects in rendering European higher education more attractive.

The present proposal should be seen as an instrument to reinforce, through concrete outputs, these processes. In so doing the European Community is fulfilling the mandate given to it by article 149 of the Treaty.

5.2. The need for a new action programme versus the use of existing ones

In the Communication of 18 July 2001, the Commission indicated that the objectives of the Community's strategy for reinforcing cooperation with third countries should be achieved, wherever possible, through existing programmes and legal bases.

At present, there are a number of Community programmes which may address the needs identified. The Socrates programme contains a clause that allows limited cooperation with third countries and international organisations in order to pursue the programme's objectives and activities are being developed under this clause in line with the strategy outlined in the Communication. The proposal to extend the Tempus programme to the Meda partners responds to the spirit of the Communication in that it significantly enlarges the geographical scope of European Community cooperation in higher education. The adoption of a scholarship scheme for graduate students from Latin America, and the establishment of new European Union Centres in Australia or Japan will certainly contribute, within their own specificity, towards achieving the general objectives of the Community strategy in this field. In the context of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries the Community has supported regional centers of excellence, providing research as well as training at Masters level in economic sciences and management, statistics, agricultural sciences, medicine and veterinary sciences. The Community will continue to support higher education in ACP countries principally at regional level.

However, none of these instruments, most of which have been in place for a number of years, provide an adequate framework to address appropriately the set of specific needs identified above. For example, Socrates (and particularly its Erasmus action) has been conceived of as a programme to be operated within the European Union and a number of third countries set out in the Council decision. However, it does not support the creation of European Masters courses, and its structure and financing would need to be completely changed for this to be possible. Equally, there are no mechanisms in Socrates that would allow for the development of a specifically European 'offer' of a large-scale mobility scheme for third country students or scholars; nor for the establishment of partnerships with third country universities and outward mobility between the European Union and these universities; and increasing the attractiveness of European higher education also falls outside its scope. It would therefore not be possible to achieve the proposal's objectives by extending the Socrates programme.

While there is an important degree of reciprocal benefit in programmes like Tempus, Alfa or Asia-Link, their primary aim is to promote regional and multilateral networking as a means to foster know-how transfer and sustainable cooperation. The present proposal's main concern is with higher education in Europe and, while third country nationals and institutions will certainly benefit from their involvement in the programme, the programme has to be seen as a tool primarily serving Community interests. To the extent that this programme complements and does not duplicate other external cooperation programmes, it remains open to nationals from countries eligible under these programmes.

In conclusion, neither Socrates nor other major education programmes address the specific needs identified above. In order for them to address these concerns, the programmes would have to be fundamentally redesigned. Redesigning them in this way would amount to the establishment of a new instrument which is in effect what the present proposal suggests.

6. THE PROGRAMME'S ADDED VALUE

As paragraph 1 of the 18 July 2001 Communication on cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education made clear, 'action at Community level is justified where it can provide "value-added": where, by acting together, the Member States can achieve more than if they were to act alone'.

The draftsmen of Article 149 of the Treaty, the legal basis for the draft proposal, clearly saw cooperation with third countries as a means to enhance quality education within the European Community.

Community programmes in education, and particularly Erasmus, have had a substantial impact in boosting the capacity for international cooperation among European universities. However, the European Union's institutions have failed fully to exploit their comparative advantage in terms of higher education networking, student and staff mobility, and the recognition of periods of study in order to develop a genuine and attractive higher education offer with international projection, particularly at postgraduate level. As the Communication points out, a further effort is required at European Community level to encourage institutions systematically to integrate new cooperation with third countries into a wider partnership framework. The proposal responds to this need for Community intervention by supporting universities' cooperative efforts to develop a European education offer and to establish structural cooperation with first class partner institutions abroad.

There is a common recognition (Parliament, Council, Commission's Communication, stakeholders consulted during ex ante evaluation process) that the European Union's institutions fail to attract a proportionate share of internationally mobile students. Scholarship schemes have mostly remained confined to bilateral arrangements at Member State level. However, there is a case today for establishing a European Community global scholarship scheme that does not replace but rather complements existing bilateral scholarship schemes already established by the individual Member States.

The Community added value is to be found in a new European cooperative approach that would complement bilateral action at Member State level. The draft proposal uses scholarships to contribute to the development of human resources and promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Scholarships also serve as an incentive to develop structured and sustainable cooperation between universities within the European Union. In particular, the proposal builds on the experience of the Socrates programme, and supports the Bologna/Prague convergence process and the European Union's Objectives Process.

It could be argued that the Community should start by providing scholarships to students from within Europe, and only look outward to third country students at a later stage. Clearly, there will always be European students on European Masters courses — they will be attracted by the quality of the offer, the European experience involved, the diversity of the student/faculty population. However, their costs would be significantly lower than those of third country students (and therefore there is less need for scholarships); and, in addition, they already have information and support mechanisms available to them within Member States that, with regard to European Union Masters Courses, third country students do not have. It must also be remembered that European students alone will not bring to Europe the world-wide recognition of European quality that the programme seeks, nor will they enable Europe to develop, over time, links with the academic, economic and social worlds in third countries that the proposed scholarship scheme will allow.

The proposal provides an efficient mechanism with European added value for attracting more international students but also with a more equitable distribution among the Member States. Through a scholarship scheme linked to European Union Masters Courses, the programme embodies a cooperative approach that would allow universities from Member States currently receiving a low inflow of third country student mobility to increase their share by networking with more attractive universities (or universities in more attractive Member States). This is the key to ensuring that the scholarship scheme does not result in reinforcing the attractiveness only of traditional higher education destinations in Europe.

The fourth pillar of the draft proposal places heavy emphasis on actions designed to promote European education in general and enhance attractiveness. By encouraging European flagship products, and by providing a European label, the programme will contribute to the definition of a European identity for higher education and will, therefore, have a positive impact on the perception of European higher education overall.

7. COMPLEMENTARITY AND SYNERGIES WITH OTHER COMMUNITY ACTIONS

The programme would be aimed primarily at enhancing the quality of European higher education. It would, therefore, be complementary to and in synergy with other programmes, such as Socrates, in particular, by developing the international dimension of education in Europe through European Masters Courses, as explained above. The programme would also complement (while avoiding overlapping and competition with) external cooperation programmes, such as Alfa, AlBan, Asia-Link or Tempus (it would focus on high level longer-term mobility through an open, global scholarship scheme) and the sixth framework programme for research (with a view to contributing towards the European Research Area) as described in this section. It would also be appropriate, once the programme is well established (say, as from 2005) to examine the feasibility (in agreement with beneficiary countries) of directing students coming to the European Union within programmes such as Alfa, AlBan or Asia-Link towards European Union Masters Courses. This would enhance complementarity and increase support for such courses, while extending the impact of Erasmus World globally.

7.1. External cooperation programmes in the field of higher education

As the Communication on strengthening cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education pointed out, the Community has established a number of initiatives with third countries drawing on experience gained from Erasmus and similar programmes. Examples of these are the two agreements with the USA and with Canada, just renewed for a further five years; the Tempus programme, originally launched in 1990 as part of the original Phare activity, but now (since the European Community's main education activities are open to associated countries) embracing Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region; Asia-Link, a programme aiming at promoting/reinforcing regional and multilateral networking between higher education institutions in European Union Member States, South Asia, South-East Asia and China; Alfa, a programme that aims at strengthening cooperation in the field of higher education between the European Union and Latin America with a view to quality enhancement and capacity building; ALBan, a programme that provides scholarships in the European Union for graduates, post-graduates and professionals from Latin America; and the support for ACP regional centres of excellence.

In its Communication on education and training in the context of poverty reduction in developing countries ⁽¹⁾, the Commission stresses the vital importance of education in reducing poverty and in development and underlines that support for higher education is a key component of the 'Education for All' strategy. Support for higher academic, technical and vocational education is just as necessary as support for primary education. Support for higher education is also necessary for countries' institutional development. Institutional capacity-building is an essential component of programmes in all sectors of development cooperation.

The Commission is aware of the need to ensure coherence between other Community policies and the policies for development cooperation. In this context it is important to note that on 22 November 2001 the Commission established an internal instruction note (the so-called 'Common Framework for cooperation with third countries in the Higher Education sector') which sets the principles and defines the main guidelines of cooperation between the European Community and developing countries, as well as with emerging economies and countries in transition, as regards the higher education sector, and establishes a frame of reference therefor ⁽²⁾. It proposes harmonising the methods of implementing Commission programmes/projects with a view to improving the effectiveness, visibility and impact of existing cooperation in the field as part of a strategy to focus efforts.

Once the present proposal has been adopted and as the implementation of the programme gets underway, the Commission will pay due regard to the principles enumerated in the above-mentioned Common Framework, draw the necessary conclusions from the 2001 evaluation on the European Community Mobility Grant-Awarding Programmes with third countries ⁽³⁾, and will set up the appropriate internal coordination mechanisms to ensure full complementarity and avoid competition and overlapping between this programme and external cooperation programmes in the field of higher education.

7.2. The sixth framework programme for research

In its 18 July 2001 Communication, the Commission indicated that the quality of European higher education institutions, measured (among other ways) through the volume and scope of institutions' scientific and technological research activities, is crucial to ensuring that Europe's status as a centre of excellence in learning and producing knowledge is appreciated around the world. Enhanced cooperation in higher education should go hand-in-hand with cooperation in science and technology, which mobilises scientific resources in universities in the European Community as well as in third countries.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2002) 116 final, 6.3.2002.

⁽²⁾ A summary of the common framework can be found in COM(2002) 116 final, 6.3.2002, Annex 7.

⁽³⁾ http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/evaluation/evinfo/sector/951632_ev.htm

The Commission's Communication on the international dimension of the European research area ⁽¹⁾ argues that the European Union must have considerable top-quality scientific and technological potential and knowledge at its disposal in order to be able to play the part to which it aspires in today's global society and, to that end, the European Research Area must be opened up to the rest of the world ⁽²⁾. It further argues that this openness should enable EU countries to benefit from international cooperation in science and technology, paving the way for closer political and economic relations, and that the new strategy of international cooperation will also make it possible to further develop relations between the European Union and third countries, will help improve dialogue between regions and countries and raise the profile of science and technology in Europe.

The sixth framework programme for research ⁽³⁾ foresees international participation in the activities of the programme targeting scientific and societal issues at bilateral, bi-regional and global level.

The Commission is aware of the great potential for complementarity and synergies between the programme described in the present proposal and the activities within the sixth framework programme for research, which will allow to create a *continuum* between both fields.

The target public of the present proposal and the target public of some of the existing or envisaged research actions are to a large extent the same, even if the nature and objectives of the activities they would pursue are not identical. Avoiding overlapping will therefore be a major Commission concern.

The Commission is currently working on mechanisms to ensure complementarity and to bridge across Community research and education and training programmes. In this context, complementarity regarding cooperation with third countries features prominently. Once the present programme has been adopted, the Commission will build on and further strengthen such mechanisms.

8. THE ISSUE OF BRAIN DRAIN

While preparing the present proposal the Commission has carefully considered the various arguments linked to the issue commonly known as 'brain drain'. The risk of brain drain should not be underestimated. This is the reason why higher education institutions participating in the programme will be strongly encouraged to make provisions in their application and admission processes in order to avoid or discourage brain drain from less developed countries. Through the programme's implementation modalities, the Commission will seek to ensure that the support granted to third country students from developing countries is linked to a plan to return to the home country.

Consciousness of the risk of brain drain should not lead to the exclusion of developing countries from the scheme. Such an exclusion would have a negative effect on the perception of Europe among nationals from these countries; it would drive mobile students away from the European Union, encouraging them to go to other destinations, such as the USA, which continues to provide significant support to students from developing countries through the Fulbright programme; last but not least, it would have a negative impact on the European Union's longer-term interests as well as those of the countries in question.

It is important to note that in its report following the Commission's Communication on reinforcing cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education ⁽⁴⁾, the European Parliament specifically asked to involve developing countries in closer cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education and to make provision for students exchanges and scholarships, and grants for those who intend to return to their country of origin as a means of brain drain prevention.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 346 final.

⁽²⁾ Publication in the OJ pending.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 180, 26.6.2001, p. 156.

⁽⁴⁾ TA P5_TAPROV(2002)04-10 Provisional Edition PE 316.566, 11.4.2002.

The Commission will tackle the issue of brain drain prior to and during the implementation and management of the programme. To this end, the Commission will identify appropriate accompanying measures, eligibility criteria and indicators, and will put in place the necessary specific monitoring mechanisms.

9. CONCLUSION

In the light of the above, the Commission proposes to the European Parliament and the Council the adoption of the present proposal for a Decision establishing a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries (Erasmus World) (2004-2008).

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty,

Whereas:

- (1) The European Community shall contribute to the development of quality education inter alia through cooperation with third countries.
- (2) The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (23-24 March 2000) emphasised that if Europe is to meet the challenge of globalisation Member States need to adapt their education and vocational training systems to the demands of the knowledge society.
- (3) The Ministers of Education of the Member States, and the Ministers of Education from fourteen other European countries, stated in the Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999) that it is necessary to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attractiveness appropriate to Europe's major cultural and scientific achievements.
- (4) The European Ministers in charge of higher education meeting in Prague (19 May 2001) further emphasised the importance of enhancing attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the world.
- (5) In its Communication on reinforcing cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education⁽¹⁾, the Commission argued that greater internationalisation of higher education is necessary to respond to the challenges of the process of globalisation, identified overall objectives

for a third-country cooperation strategy in this field and suggested concrete measures for achieving these objectives.

- (6) There is a need to step up Community efforts to promote dialogue and understanding between cultures world-wide, specially as mobility fosters the discovery of new cultural and social environments and facilitates understanding thereof.
- (7) There is wide recognition of the great potential represented by the combined individual strengths of European higher education institutions, by their educational diversity and wide experience in networking, which enables them to offer courses of great quality unique to Europe and which allows the benefits of international mobility to be shared more widely within the Community and its partner countries.
- (8) European higher education institutions must remain at the leading edge of developments; to this end they should seek to establish cooperation with third-country institutions that have achieved a level of development comparable to that of higher education institutions in the Community.
- (9) It is necessary to establish a Community programme.
- (10) In order to reinforce the added value of Community action it is necessary to ensure coherence and complementarity between the actions implemented in the framework of this Decision and other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions, in particular the sixth framework programme for research and external cooperation programmes in the higher education sector.
- (11) The Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement) provides for greater cooperation in the field of education, training and youth between the European Community and its Member States, on the one hand, and the countries of the European Free Trade Association participating in the European Economic Area (EEA EFTA States), on the other; the conditions and the modalities for the participation of the above countries in this programme shall be established in accordance with the relevant provisions of the EEA Agreement.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 385 final, 18.7.2001.

(12) The conditions and the modalities for the participation of the associated central and eastern European countries (CEEC) in this programme shall be established in accordance with the provisions foreseen in the European agreements, in their additional protocols and in the decisions of the respective Association Councils; concerning Cyprus, the relevant conditions and modalities shall be funded by additional appropriations in accordance with the procedures to be agreed with that country; concerning Malta and Turkey, the relevant conditions and modalities shall be funded by additional appropriations in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty.

(13) This programme should be regularly monitored and evaluated in cooperation between the Commission and the Member States in order to allow for readjustments, particularly in the priorities for implementing the measures; the evaluation should include an external evaluation to be conducted by independent, impartial bodies.

(14) Since the objectives of the proposed action concerning the contribution of European cooperation to quality education cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, *inter alia*, because of the need for multilateral partnerships and multilateral mobility and Community/third country exchanges of information and can therefore be better achieved at Community level owing to the transnational dimension of Community actions and measures, the European Community may adopt measures in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives.

(15) This Decision establishes a financial framework for the entire duration of the programme which is to be the principal point of reference for the budgetary authority, within the meaning of point 33 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 6 May 1999 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, on budgetary discipline and improvement of the budgetary procedure.

(16) The measures necessary for the implementation of this Decision should be adopted in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission ⁽¹⁾,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

Establishment of the programme

1. This Decision establishes a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation

with third countries, 'Erasmus World', hereinafter referred to as 'the programme'.

2. This programme shall be implemented over a period starting on 1 January 2004 and ending on 31 December 2008.

Article 2

Definitions

For the purpose of this Decision:

1. 'higher education institution': means any institution which according to national legislation or practice offers qualifications or degrees at that level, whatever such establishments may be called.

2. 'third country graduate student': means a national of a third country other than those from EEA EFTA States and countries candidate for accession to the European Union; who has already obtained a first higher education degree; who is not a resident of any of the Member States or the participating countries as provided for in Article 12; who may not have carried out his or her main activity (studies, work, etc.) for more than a total of 12 months over the last five years in any of the Member States or the participating countries; and who has been accepted to register or is registered in a European Union Masters Course as described in the Annex.

3. 'third country scholar': means a national of a third country other than those from EEA EFTA States and countries candidate for accession to the European Community; who is not a resident of any of the Member States or the participating countries as provided for in Article 12; who may not have carried out his or her main activity (studies, work, etc.) for more than a total of 12 months over the last five years in any of the Member States or the participating countries; and who has outstanding academic and/or professional experience.

4. 'graduate or postgraduate studies': means courses of higher education study that follow a first degree and lead to a second degree.

Article 3

Objectives of the programme

1. The programme's overall aim is to enhance quality education by improving the perception of European higher education world-wide and by fostering cooperation with third countries in order to improve the development of human resources and to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures.

2. The programme's specific objectives are:

(a) to promote the emergence of a distinctly European offer in higher education, attractive both within the European Union and beyond its borders;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23.

(b) to encourage a greater world-wide interest in the acquisition of European qualifications and/or experience among highly qualified graduates and scholars from all over the world, and to enable them to obtain such qualifications and/or experience;

(c) to strengthen a more structured cooperation between European Union and third country institutions and a greater EU outgoing mobility as part of European study programmes;

(d) to enhance the profile and visibility of, and improved accessibility to, European education.

3. The Commission shall, when pursuing the objectives of the programme, observe the Community's general policy on equal opportunities for men and women. The Commission shall also ensure that no group of citizens or third country nationals is excluded or disadvantaged.

Article 4

Programme Actions

1. The objectives of this programme as set out in article 2 shall be pursued by means of the following actions:

- (a) European Union Masters Courses;
- (b) a Scholarship scheme;
- (c) partnerships with third country higher education institutions;
- (d) enhancing the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination;
- (e) technical support measures.

2. These actions shall be realised with the procedures described in the Annex, and through the following types of approaches, which may be combined where appropriate:

- (a) support for the development of joint educational programmes and cooperation networks facilitating the exchange of experience and good practice;
- (b) support for mobility, between the European Community and third countries, of people in the field of higher education;
- (c) promotion of language skills and the understanding of different cultures;
- (d) support for pilot projects based on transnational partnerships designed to develop innovation and quality in international higher education;

(e) support for the development of methods of analysis and follow-up of trends in, and evolution of, international higher education.

Article 5

Access to the programme

Under the conditions and arrangements for implementation specified in the Annex, this programme is aimed in particular at:

- (a) higher education institutions;
- (b) students having obtained a first higher education degree;
- (c) scholars or professionals who lecture or conduct research;
- (d) staff directly involved in higher education;
- (e) public or private bodies involved with higher education.

Article 6

Implementation of the programme and cooperation with the Member States

1. The Commission shall:

- (a) ensure the implementation of the Community actions covered by this programme in conformity with the Annex;
- (b) take account of bilateral cooperation with third countries undertaken by Member States;
- (c) consult the relevant associations and organisations in the field of higher education at European level and shall inform the Committee referred to in Article 8 of their opinions;
- (d) seek synergies with other intra-Community programmes and actions in the field of higher education and research.

2. The Member States shall:

- (a) take the necessary steps to ensure the efficient running of the programme at Member State level involving all the parties concerned in education in accordance with national practice;
- (b) designate appropriate structures that shall cooperate closely with the Commission; particularly as regards information about the programme;
- (c) endeavour to adopt such measures as may be deemed appropriate to remove legal and administrative barriers to the effective operation of this programme;

- (d) take steps to ensure that potential synergies with other Community programmes are achieved at Member State level.

Article 7

Implementing measures

1. The following measures necessary for the implementation of this Decision shall be adopted in accordance with the management procedure referred to in Article 8(2):

- (a) the annual plan of work, including priorities, and the selection criteria and procedures;
- (b) the general guidelines for implementing the programme;
- (c) the annual budget and the breakdown of funds among the different actions of the programme;
- (d) the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the programme and for the dissemination and transfer of results.

2. All other measures necessary for the implementation of this Decision shall be adopted in accordance with the advisory procedure referred to in Article 8(3).

Article 8

Committee

1. The Commission shall be assisted by a Committee composed of representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission.

2. Where reference is made to this paragraph, Articles 4 and 7 of Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, having regard to the provisions of Article 8 thereof.

The period laid down in Article 4(3) of Decision 1999/468/EC shall be set at two months.

3. Where reference is made to this paragraph, Articles 3 and 7 of Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, having regard to the provisions of Article 8 thereof.

4. The Committee shall adopt its rules of procedure.

Article 9

Cooperation with other programme committees and information on other Community initiatives

To ensure the consistency of this programme with other measures referred to in Article 11, the Commission shall keep the Committee regularly informed about Community initiatives taken in the fields of education, training and youth, including cooperation with third countries and international organisations.

Article 10

Funding

1. The financial framework for the implementation of this programme for the period specified in Article 1 is hereby set at EUR 200 million.

2. The annual appropriations shall be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limits of the financial perspective.

Article 11

Consistency and complementarity

1. The Commission shall, in cooperation with the Member States, ensure overall consistency and complementarity with other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions, in particular with the sixth framework programme for research and with external cooperation programmes in the field of higher education.

2. The Commission shall ensure efficient linkage and, where appropriate, joint actions, between this programme and the programmes and actions in the area of education undertaken within the framework of the Community's cooperation with third countries, including bilateral agreements, and the competent international organisations.

Article 12

Participation of EEA EFTA States, and candidate countries for accession to the European Union

The conditions and modalities for the participation of EEA EFTA States and countries candidate for accession to the European Union in this programme shall be established in accordance with the relevant provisions of the instruments governing the relations between the European Community and these countries.

Article 13

Monitoring and evaluation

1. The Commission shall regularly monitor this programme in cooperation with the Member States. The results of the monitoring and evaluation process shall be utilised when implementing the programme.

This monitoring shall include the reports referred to in paragraph 3 and specific activities.

2. This programme shall be evaluated regularly by the Commission. This evaluation is intended to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of actions implemented with regard to the objectives referred to in Article 3. It will also consider the impact of the programme as a whole. Special attention will be paid to gender issues and equity issues, as well as the prevention of brain drain.

This evaluation will also examine the complementarity between action under this programme and that pursued under other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions.

3. The Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:

(a) on the accession of new Member States, a report on the financial consequences of these accessions on the programme, followed, if appropriate, by proposals to deal with the financial consequences of these accessions on the programme, in accordance with the provisions of the Inter-institutional Agreement of 6 May 1999 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and with the conclusions of the Berlin European Council of March 1999. The European Parliament and the Council will take a decision on such proposals as soon as possible;

(b) an interim evaluation report on the results achieved and on the qualitative aspects of the implementation of this programme by 30 June 2007;

(c) a communication on the continuation of this programme by 31 December 2007,

(d) an ex-post evaluation report by 31 December 2009.

Article 14

Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

ANNEX

COMMUNITY ACTIONS

This Annex describes five actions:

ACTION 1: EUROPEAN UNION MASTERS COURSES

ACTION 2: SCHOLARSHIPS

Action 2.1: Global Student Scheme

Action 2.2: Visiting Scholar Scheme

ACTION 3: PARTNERSHIPS WITH THIRD COUNTRY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

ACTION 4: ENHANCING ATTRACTIVENESS

ACTION 5: SUPPORT MEASURES

ACTION 1: EUROPEAN UNION MASTERS COURSES

1. The Community will identify and grant European postgraduate courses the label of 'European Union Masters Courses' through a rigorous selection process as provided for in Article 7(1) and in accordance with the procedure set out in Article 8(2).

2. For the purpose of this programme, European Union Masters Courses shall:

- (a) involve a minimum of three higher education institutions from three different Member States;
- (b) implement a study programme which involves a period of study in at least two of the three institutions under (a);
- (c) have built-in mechanisms for the recognition of periods of study undertaken in partner institutions in accordance for example with the European Credit Transfer System;
- (d) result in the awarding of double or multiple recognised or accredited degrees from the participating institutions.
- (e) reserve a minimum of places for, and host, third country students who have been granted financial support under this programme;
- (f) establish transparent conditions for admissions which pay due regard, inter alia, to gender issues and equity issues;

- (g) agree to respect the rules applicable to the selection procedure of grantees (students and scholars);
 - (h) put in place adequate arrangements to facilitate access for, and hosting of, third country students (information facilities, accommodation, etc.);
 - (i) provide, as appropriate, for students' language preparation and assistance.
3. European Union Masters Courses will be selected for a five-year period, subject to a light-weight annual renewal procedure based on progress reporting, which period could include a year's preparatory activities before the actual course begins to run. Funding would be subject to the annual renewal procedure.

ACTION 2: SCHOLARSHIPS

1. The Community will establish a single, global scholarship scheme targeted at the best qualified third country graduate students and scholars.
2. Scholarships will be open to third country students and scholars as defined in Article 2, without any precondition for participation other than the existence of relations between the European Union and the country of origin of the students and scholars in question. Participation of women and less-advantaged students from these countries will be encouraged.
3. Participating institutions will be encouraged to involve stakeholders in the field of higher education in third countries and will be required to make provision in their application and selection processes to avoid or discourage brain drain from less developed countries.
4. In accordance with Article 6(2), Member States shall take the necessary steps to expedite the granting of entry visas and stay permits to grantees and, where required, the granting of degree equivalence.
5. The selection procedure shall ensure appropriate balance across fields of study and students' and scholars' regions of provenance and Member State of destination and will encourage the participation of women and less-advantaged students from third countries.
6. The Commission shall take steps to ensure that no student or scholar receives financial support for the same purpose under more than one Community programme.

Action 2.1: Global Student Scheme

The Community may provide financial support to third country students who have been admitted, through a competitive process, to European Union Masters Courses.

Action 2.2: Visiting Scholar Scheme

The Community shall provide financial support to third country scholars visiting the European Union Masters Courses, with a view to carrying out teaching and research assignments and scholarly work in the institutions participating in European Union Masters Courses.

ACTION 3: PARTNERSHIPS WITH THIRD COUNTRY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1. The Community will support structured relations between European Union Masters Courses and third country higher education institutions. Priority will be given to institutions sufficiently well-developed to be able to cooperate on an equal footing.
2. Partnerships will provide the framework for outgoing mobility of European Union students and scholars involved in the European Union Masters Courses.
3. Partnerships will serve to develop, whenever possible, institutionalised networks, based on structured and sustainable cooperation designed to contribute to the development of local capacity through the transfer of know-how.

4. Partnerships will:

- involve a European Union Masters Course and at least one higher education institution from a third country;
- be established for periods of up to three years;
- provide a framework for outgoing mobility for students enrolled in the European Unions Masters Courses and the Courses' teachers; eligible students and scholars must be citizens of the European Union or third country nationals who had been legal residents in the European Union for at least three years (and for purposes other than study) before the start of the outgoing mobility;
- ensure recognition of study periods at the host (i.e., non-European) institution.

5. Partnership project activities may also include:

- teaching assignments at a partner institution supporting the project's curriculum development;
- exchanges of teachers, trainers, administrators, and other relevant specialists;
- development and dissemination of new methodologies in higher education, including the use of information and communication technologies, e-learning, and open and distance learning;
- development of cooperation schemes with third country universities with a view to offering a course in the country in question.

ACTION 4: ENHANCING ATTRACTIVENESS

1. Through this action, the Community shall support activities aimed at enhancing the profile and visibility of, and accessibility to, European education. The Community shall also support complementary activities that contribute to the objectives of this programme.
2. Eligible institutions would include public or private organisations dealing with issues pertaining to the provision of higher education domestically or at international level. Activities shall be conducted within networks involving a minimum of three organisations from three different Member States and may involve organisations from third countries. Activities (which may include seminars, conferences, workshops, development of ICT tools, production of material for publication, etc.) may take place in the Member States or in third countries.

4.1. Support for joint promotional actions

1. The Community will provide support to higher education institutions and public non-profit making organisations working towards the promotion of European higher education abroad.
2. Eligible activities may include:
 - development of general written or visual common information and dissemination tools contributing towards a better understanding of the value of study in Europe;
 - joint representation of European higher education and European Union Masters Courses at international fairs and other events;
 - seminars, workshops and other means with a view to coordinating information and dissemination efforts;
 - activities targeting geographical areas having a significant potential in terms of international student mobility.
3. Promotional activities shall seek to establish links between higher education and research, and exploit whenever possible potential synergies.

4.2. Support for services facilitating access of third country students to European education

1. The European Community will support collaborative activities aimed at facilitating access to, and encouraging study in, Europe.

2. Eligible activities may include:

- joint development of pedagogic tools for language training and cultural preparation;
- joint development of more effective methods of hosting and integrating third country students;
- development of joint distance education modules targeting third country students;
- services facilitating mobility between university partnerships within and outside European Union Masters Courses as defined above;
- services facilitating mobility with children and other dependent people;
- further development of an internet gateway to facilitate access to European Union Masters Courses as well as to other European courses suitable for third country students.

4.3. Complementary activities

1. The Community shall support complementary activities dealing with issues crucial to the internationalisation of higher education such as the international dimension of:

- quality assurance, including accreditation or other types of quality labels or specifications;
- credit recognition;
- recognition of European qualifications abroad and mutual recognition of qualifications with third countries;
- evolving curriculum development needs;
- changes in society and in education systems;
- safety and health for exchange students;
- consumer protection issues linked to education;
- surveys and studies (e.g. on the decision-making process of foreign students seeking study abroad, on obstacles to study in Europe, etc.).

2. Through this action the Community may support international thematic networks to deal with these issues.

3. The Community may support pilot projects with third countries with a view to developing further cooperation in the field of higher education with the countries in question.

4. The Community may provide, on a pilot basis, scholarships to third country students seeking a postgraduate degree from a European university or a consortium of European universities where no other Community action provides for such financial support, and where complementarity with bilateral schemes at Member State level can be ensured.

5. The Community shall support an Alumni Association of all students (third country and Europeans) graduating from European Union Masters Courses.

ACTION 5: TECHNICAL SUPPORT MEASURES

In carrying out the programme, the Commission may have recourse to experts, to an executive agency, to existing competent agencies in Member States and, if necessary, to other forms of technical assistance, the financing of which may be provided from within the overall financial framework of the programme.
