

Scoping the Ambassadorial Potential of the EU's Global Gateway

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Policy Recommendations

- Fully acknowledge and build on the strength of European higher education and research tradition and novelty
- Take inspiration from well-established, European good practices
- Support hands-on learning for future European ambassadors
- Tailor the evaluation of the 2021-2027 programming to identify the ambassadorial accomplishment

The EU Global Gateway is a comprehensive plan for infrastructure development worldwide, with education and research as one of its investment priorities for the 2021-2027 period. The Global Gateway is the third EU flagship initiative of the von der Leyen Commission. The other two are the European Green Deal and the Next Generation EU. The investment priority of the EU's Global Gateway in education and research is primarily financed by the Erasmus+ and the Horizon Europe programmes.¹ Beyond offering outstanding learning and research opportunities, the programmes aim to strengthen the immersion of beneficiaries into the remarkable sites of world-renown expertise across the EU (and elsewhere), such as academic institutions, as well as private, international, and non-governmental

entities. It opens doors to a network of people with talent and potential to shape the future of Europe. This experience should, furthermore, reinforce in beneficiaries a strong sense of belonging to the values, ideals, and policy directions advanced by the EU at home and externally.

The existing literature and policy insights on educational diplomacy,² science diplomacy³ and international exchanges⁴ attest to the EU's potential to sensitize highly skilled individuals worldwide through its education and research programmes. People-to-people ties are fostered by these programmes. Therefore, when talking about the ambassadorial potential of the EU's Global Gateway, the focus is placed on the potential for the beneficiaries of EU's education programmes to become future promoters of the EU. This policy brief focuses on recommendations for the pre-allocation stage of the grants and/or ex-post⁵ evaluations or other types of analyses of the implementation of Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes. The aim of this brief is to discuss the underexploited capacity of both funding schemes to foster amicable ties between the EU and other parts of the world that last beyond the funding period. Professionally rewarding personal experiences, and improved people-to-people connectivity, as well as enhanced familiarity with various national and cultural backgrounds would be the bedrock of such an ambassadorial potential.

- **Fully acknowledge and build on the strength of the European educational tradition and novelty**

European higher education and research mobility instruments, such as Erasmus(+) and Marie (Skłodowska-)Curie Actions, are slowly but steadily making their way into the research on both international academic careers and the flows of a highly-skilled labour force. This policy brief singles out these instruments, not solely because of their value in offering memorable learning and research opportunities, but also because, following the reflections of Arifon,⁶ these programmes should contribute to the soft power potential of the EU, through a continued and vibrant circulation of ideas, expressed and upheld by many bright minds across the world. Scholars, interested in the dynamics of leading higher education institutions, have approached learning not as a temporary commodity, but as a long-term investment that has a strong connection to foreign policy goals due to the view that centres of expertise are local, national, and global assets.⁷

The study and research hubs of Europe are well-positioned to stress the importance of learning as a long-term relational investment. Firstly, Europe is the birthplace of the university. It has well-established and organic roots for raising the next generations of European 'ambassadors'. In other words, university graduates carry European values back with them to their countries of origin, having being immersed in the rich culture of Europe and its renowned tradition of excelling innovation and science. This is exemplified by science diplomacy studies that incorporate large-scale research infrastructures⁸ and build on the decades-long joint efforts and milestones of Big Science both in Europe and worldwide.⁹ Science diplomacy adds a new layer of foreign policy and external action considerations to these mega-science ventures. Among the latter's multifaceted benefits is the prestige that comes with the pooling of world-acclaimed expertise for attaining new scientific breakthroughs. The historical path-dependency¹⁰ of many European higher education and research establishments contrasts with certain traits, shown

by several increasingly popular higher education and research destinations. For example, in China, the cultural mission of some learning centres is challenged by the university being a "foreign transplant".¹¹ Thus, Europe's higher education and research history and path-dependency are strong advantages that can be used to further the EU's foreign policy goals by making them public goods, continuously accessible to people from across the world.

Secondly, the tradition and reputation of many learning and science hubs in Europe means that the beneficiaries and implementing institutions of the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes do not need to suffer from the somewhat superficial quest of "American branding" encountered in some parts of the world.¹² This practice of seeking or claiming affiliation to American standards of higher educational structure and course contents serves neither the standing of the American university tradition, nor secures the reputation-boosting attempt of the managers of some universities on other continents. Additionally, given the negative implications of geopolitical tensions on the continuity and conditions of some research funding schemes,¹³ international partnership and collaborative opportunities offered by Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe remain an alternative that foreign universities could consider to further their reputation.

“ ...the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes represent a unique opportunity to make lasting investments in future Europe-educated intellectual leaders globally. ”

- **Take inspiration from well-established, European good practices**

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. One well-established, good practice is the College of Europe. There is possibly no better place to realise how closely the study and policy dimensions of the EU are intertwined. Major developments in international relations are echoed on a day-to-day basis, either during classroom debates, question and answer sessions of frequently hosted guest lectures, or talks over lunch and coffee breaks. Thereby, students become socialised to the intricacies of the 'Brussels Bubble' well before their graduation and the start of

their professional careers, whether they be directly in the 'capital' of the EU, or in routine encounters with key EU institutions while being located elsewhere. The College embodies a pro-European intellectual ecosystem where people-to-people contacts, among individuals from over 50 different countries, form mutual understanding and cross-border networks every day.

It attests to the importance of the early stages of well-curated socialisation in a multicultural environment and should be attributed beyond the campuses of the College. Students' awareness of the unique and multifaceted learning process, brought about by being 'united in diversity', is of the essence for their mastery of soft skills and future careers.

This socialisation achievement and the high-profile alumni of the College, who are frequent reference points either in the media or in public discussions, capture the essence and inspiration of what can be attained through the EU Global Gateway.

- **Support hands-on learning for future European ambassadors**

The success of the new generation of diplomacies, for example, digital diplomacy, rests on their versatility of combining the most appreciated traits of classical diplomacy with contemporary technological novelties in an international context hosting a wealth of advocates of diverse interests.

Internationally established, hands-on learning practices of high-level and expert negotiations are among the most widespread means of introducing students and professionals to diplomacy, and attuning their awareness and skills to the contemporary diplomatic setting and its latest trends. This intellectual exercise forms perhaps one of the most performative stages of the overall learning process. Experienced both at the College of Europe and elsewhere, simulations offer participants an opportunity to showcase their mastery of expert-level terminology and formalities related to multilateral deliberations. The articulation of their interests can be honed in the pursuit of defending a specific national or institutional stance, while keeping an eye on the consensus-building process.

The recommendation is to encourage the introduction of such practice-oriented learning

exercises in European studies programmes, where such a component is absent, especially if it is an EU-funded study centre, or an applicant entity for Erasmus+ or Horizon Europe programmes. Offering students first-hand exposure to the nuts and bolts of EU foreign-policy routines and the crafting of joint stances should broaden their understanding of the unique traits of post-Westphalian external action.

- **Tailor the evaluation of the 2021-2027 programming to identify the ambassadorial accomplishment**

Building on the previously articulated points, the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes represent a unique opportunity to make lasting investments in future Europe-educated intellectual leaders globally. Europe depends on those who believe in it. The more supporters of Europe there are in the world, the more solid the standing of Europe internationally is and will be. To support the EU's standing in the world, a beneficiary of Erasmus+ or Horizon Europe programme does not have to embark on a diplomatic career, per se. The success and long-term impact of the goals and aspirations captured by the EU external action depend on the receptiveness of a myriad of professionals and experts. Thus, the true diplomatic achievement of the EU relies on a broad range of tacit ambassadors who can uphold the EU's goals and values in their routines errands, not just occasional encounters with the diplomatic corps.

To translate this vision into more tangible steps, the pre-allocation stage of the grants and/or ex-post evaluations, or other types of analyses focusing on the implementation of Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes, should allow for evaluating the ambassadorial potential of high-skilled talent across the world and tracking their progress. It would offer some evidence-informed and more nuanced insight into the soft-power potential of the EU's Global Gateway, outlined in this policy brief.

References

¹ European Commission. 2021. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank. The Global Gateway*. Brussels: European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/joint_communication_global_gateway.pdf.

² Gerards, Carsten, Simon Schunz, and Chad Damro. 2021. "Opportunity, Presence and Entrepreneurship: Why the EU Acts Externally on Higher Education." *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13154>

³ Kuhlmann, Stefan, and Ewert Aukes. 2022. "Science Diplomacy in and for Sweden." Stockholm: Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research (STINT). https://www.stint.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/STINT_Science_Diplomacy.pdf

⁴ Trilokekar, Roopa Desai, Amira El Masri, and Hani El Masry. 2020. "Power, Politics, and Education: Canadian Universities and International Education in an Era of New Geopolitics." *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 50 (3): 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.188777>.

⁵ Ex-post evaluation is a widely used evaluation form at the European Commission. It analyses a specific intervention, for example, its relevance, outcomes, and results compared to the initial goals of the intervention, potential unintended effects and whether those can be attributed to the evaluated intervention.

⁶ Arifon, Olivier. 2019. "Comparing Chinese and EU Soft Power: The Credibility Factor." *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation* 5 (2): 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2018-002-arif>.

⁷ Trilokekar, Roopa Desai, and Zainab Kizilbash. 2013. "IMAGINE: Canada as a Leader in International Education. How Can Canada Benefit from the Australian Experience?" *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 43 (2): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v43i2.2103>.

⁸ Åberg, Anna. 2021. "The Ways and Means of ITER: Reciprocity and Compromise in Fusion Science Diplomacy." *History and Technology* 37 (1): 106–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07341512.2021.1891851>.

⁹ Hallonsten, Olof. 2016. *Big Science Transformed: Science, Politics and Organization in Europe and the United States*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32738-9>

¹⁰ Path-dependency refers to a propensity of institutions to evolve according to a certain pattern that is determined by their prior structural and intellectual dispositions. It is a common term in historical institutionalism studies.

¹¹ Yang, Rui. 2017. "The Cultural Mission of China's Elite Universities: Examples from Peking and Tsinghua." *Studies in Higher Education* 42 (10): 1825–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1376873>.

¹² Long, Kyle A. 2018. "Battle of the Brand: Independent 'American' Universities Abroad." *International Higher Education*, no. 95: 4–5. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10716>.

¹³ Long, Kyle A, Chief Etheridge, Carly O'Connell, and Kat Hugins. 2021. "Rising Global Fears of Foreign Interference in Higher Education." *International Higher Education*, no. 107: 8–10. <https://doi.org/10.36197/IHE.2021.107.04>.

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