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Citation for published version:

Wilson, I 2011, 'What Should we Expect of 'Erasmus Generations'', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 49, no. 5, pp. 1113-1140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02158.x>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02158.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02158.x)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Wilson, I. (2011). What Should we Expect of 'Erasmus Generations'?. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49(5), 1113-1140. [10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02158.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02158.x)

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What should we expect of ‘Erasmus generations’?

Abstract

The Erasmus programme promotes student mobility within the European Union largely on the assumption that mobile students will become more pro-European. This article presents the results of a panel study of Erasmus students which suggest that, while former Erasmus students may be more pro-European than their peers, this is because students who choose to take part are already more pro-European. The attitudes to Europe and voting preferences of Erasmus students do not seem to diverge from their non-mobile peers while they are abroad. Although the programme may have other benefits, expecting it to create Europhile ‘Erasmus generations’ seems unrealistic.

Introduction

The European Union’s Erasmus programme represents a significant Union-level intervention into European higher education systems¹. Since 1987 over a million European students have received financial support from the European Commission to spend part of their courses studying in a European country other than the country in which their ‘home’ institution is based. In most cases this means that students who normally study in their home countries

¹ While higher-education institutions of all EU member-states participate in Erasmus, the programme also includes colleges and universities in the European Economic Area and Turkey (EACEA 2009). There are related higher education mobility programmes involving links between EU countries and other neighbouring states and even, in Erasmus Mundus, funds to enable highly-qualified citizens of any country in the world to study at European universities.

receive funding to go abroad² and assurances that courses they complete there will contribute to a degree from their home universities. Erasmus has become one of the most high-visibility EU programmes and has become iconic for Euro-enthusiasts, whose use of the term “Erasmus generation” to describe young Europeans (e.g. Figel 2007: 6, Kuneva 2007: 3) invokes a hope that European youth will prove more supportive of European integration than their parents or grandparents have been. The Erasmus generation, it is suggested, is made up of young people who have enjoyed the practical benefits of European integration, are highly mobile, think of themselves as European citizens, and consequently are a base of support for further European integration. Foremost among these are the alumni of the programme which gives the generation its name, former Erasmus students.

It does seem to be true that younger citizens of European member-states, and students in particular, tend to be more likely to think of themselves as European (Eurobarometer 2008: 34, Hix 1999: 147). Students who have taken part in Erasmus tend to be particularly pro-European (ESN 2007). However, it does not follow that Erasmus is responsible. If Erasmus leads to pro-European views we would expect not only that former Erasmus students will be more pro-European than their non-Erasmus counterparts, but also that there would be an observable change in their attitudes while they were abroad. The alternative possibility is that Erasmus students are more pro-European simply because more pro-European students choose to take part.

If Erasmus affects the attitudes of Erasmus students themselves, this impact may also diffuse through their social networks, spreading its influence beyond the students directly involved. However, it is difficult to imagine that the programme could have such secondary

² A surprisingly large number of students who are already studying in a foreign country are ‘re-exported’ to a third country, or even take advantage of the support to attend universities in their home countries.

effects without first affecting Erasmus students. Any impact would surely be most intense for the iconic individuals who actually choose to immerse themselves in another European culture through European-Commission-sponsored study abroad.

Knowing whether this assumption is correct is important for both policymaking and theory-testing. Erasmus has been held up as a means of building support for the European Union among member-states' citizens. Whether or not the programme is demonstrably building support for the Union among current students, some of whom will presumably go on to become future European elites, is important information for policymakers. Like every other government programme, Erasmus has opportunity costs both in money and in the talents and attention of its administrators, which could be employed elsewhere. Self-evidently, Erasmus serves multiple ends. As well as possibly building support for the European project among Europe's citizens, for example, it may contribute to the learning of European languages and make its alumni more mobile, competitive workers in the future. Which of these objectives is seen as the most achievable may well have implications for how the programme's resources are targeted. But understanding Erasmus also has broader importance because it is an ideal test case for educational socialisation. If Erasmus can build support for the European Union this strengthens the case that being partly educated in a foreign country can build support for more positive international relations. Promoting student mobility more generally could be a means to build international solidarity. European integration is an example, albeit a particularly advanced one, of more intimate international relations which are supposedly becoming more common as a result of globalisation. These often have significant consequences for private citizens, and public opinion in the countries involved may have a significant impact on how far international integration can progress. If it is possible to propagate support for international intercourse through schemes like Erasmus this may smooth the process of globalisation.

It should therefore come as a surprise that very few studies have been conducted which can reliably assess whether participating in Erasmus causes changes in attitudes to Europe on a political level. After establishing that a desire to build support for European integration has been central to the constellation of forces which have led to the creation of the Erasmus programme, this paper will examine theoretical models which specify how Erasmus might affect students' attitudes to Europe. I then go on to demonstrate that the existing literature on Erasmus does not deal with the issue satisfactorily. Previous studies either neglect the potential impact on students' political attitudes or else address it in such a way that causality cannot be established. As existing studies do not adequately address the question, I will present evidence from a new panel study of Erasmus students which suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that the net impact of exchange experiences on the students is minimal.

What is Erasmus for?

One of the difficulties of evaluating the Erasmus programme is that its declared objectives have changed repeatedly throughout its history. It is tempting to assume when evaluating a programme that it is successful if it effectively fulfils its declared objectives. Unfortunately, this assumption can be highly problematic, as objectives often emerge from a rather chaotic environment which Kingdon (1984: Ch6) memorably labels the "policy primordial soup". Before a particular policy is decided, many ideas are available, often championed by particular people who have become attached to them. In order for ideas such as supporting student mobility within the EU to become programmes, coalitions have to be formed in support of them. The members of these coalitions may have different objectives but want to do the same things to achieve them. Some might wish to increase political support for the European Union while others may wish to improve the employability of European graduates.

Creating a student mobility programme may seem to serve both of these ends, even if they may point in slightly different directions when it comes to the detail of how the programme should be designed. The programmes which eventually emerge from the policymaking process may well be a product of compromises between the members of the coalition, leading to a certain vagueness about what the programme is actually *for*. Similarly, while the programme is operating this coalition still needs to be maintained or expanded in order for it to survive. This may lead to changes in the programme's declared objectives throughout its life, even when it continues to do very similar things.

Regardless of whether Kingdon's model of the policymaking process is generalisable, it certainly seems to fit the creation of the Erasmus programme rather well. Over the years Erasmus has been presented as a means to a great variety of ends, which causes some confusion as to what criteria should be used to evaluate the programme (Sigalas 2006: 7-10). Based on a review of official publications on the subject, Papatsiba (2005) has identified four fundamental justifications for Commission support for Erasmus. Erasmus has been presented as a means to "create a European consciousness" (Papatsiba 2005: 174), to help alumni transcend intra-European borders during their future careers (lubricating the common European labour market), to allow the transfer of skills, techniques and technology within Europe (dynamising the economy), and to help students to acquire such personal characteristics as independence and intercultural sensitivity, as well as improving their language skills. While building support for the Europe-building project among European citizens is a recurring theme, simply reading official documents would suggest not only that that this is only one of several objectives the programme, but that it is a secondary objective. The economic case for Erasmus has tended to be given most weight in official mission statements (Papatsiba 2005: 177, 184).

Recent work on the history of Erasmus, however, indicates that building popular support for the EU, largely by generating pro-European graduates, has in fact been central to the Erasmus project (Corbett 2003, 2005, Fernández 2005, Papatsiba 2005, Sigalas 2006, 2008). Education is a particularly good example of a policy area in which many officials within the European Commission, who have had ideas which might contribute to European integration, have faced pressure to downplay their Europe-building agendas. Because there is not a strong foundation of public attachment to the European Union (Arts and Halman 2005/6), policymakers cannot rely on public support for such ideas. There are therefore incentives for sponsors of any policy which might be seen as a means of drawing power from national governments to the central EU institutions to minimise their visibility and therefore the potential for conflict (Scharpf 1999: 23-4). Education has always been a particularly sensitive area in this respect, with national governments historically jealous of their monopoly on education policy and any perception that young citizens were to be steered in a pro-European direction controversial (Corbett 2005). A sensible Commission official faced with these circumstances might well believe that a policy intended to build the European Union's fragile base of public support through education would have difficulty finding support. The path of least resistance might be to pursue the policy but to emphasise a less-controversial objective. The Erasmus programme was the product of a team effort and some members genuinely do seem to have considered the political benefits to be of secondary importance, but for others they were central.

Corbett (2003, 2005) identifies three figures within the European Commission who played particularly central roles in expanding existing (relatively trivial) exchange support schemes into Erasmus in 1987. Peter Sutherland was the Commissioner responsible, but education was only a small part of his remit and he was willing to leave development to his subordinate, Hywel Ceri Jones, who introduced him to an already fairly developed proposal on his arrival

in post. Jones himself had worked in education through the release of the Janne, Tindemans and Adonnino Reports, all of which had emphasised the need to make Europeans more attached to the EU (Janne 1973, Tindemans 1975, Adonnino 1985). He himself seems to have been attracted less to Erasmus' socialising role than to its educational or economic potential (Corbett 2003: 323, 2005: Ch8). On the other hand, Michel Richonnier, who guided Erasmus through Sutherland's cabinet and was responsible for dramatically scaling up an originally cautious proposal, was a notable exponent of its Europe-building potential. In his thinking:

[A] mentality of cooperation can and must be encouraged in particular among Europeans before they have completed their studies [...] a higher level of mobility among the 6mn students at 3,600 institutions must be regarded as a crucial development in policies of ensuring the economic and social development if [sic] the community as a whole (Richonnier, cited in Corbett 2005: 131)

These officials had already laid the basic plans for Erasmus by 1985, but they were willing to take advantage of convenient events. The European Court of Justice ruling in *Gravier v.s. City of Liège* (European Court of Justice 1985) was such an opportunity. Before 1985 member states had been obliged to allow other members' nationals vocational training on the grounds that this was a component of the common labour market. The *Gravier* ruling expanded the definition of 'vocational' to include essentially all education which gave students a career advantage (Adia 1998 Ch4, Cheiladaki-Liarokapi 2007: 18-20, Sprokkereef 1995: 341-3). To take advantage of this, Erasmus was sold to member states as a means of channelling students away from uncontrolled migration and into formal exchanges – even though the programme had been in development for years. Consequently, the employability and economic objectives were given greater weight (Corbett 2003: 325, 328).

Thus, while some of Erasmus' sponsors did see it primarily as a means to economic and educational ends, their importance may have been overstated for political convenience. Given that the Erasmus programme, like many other policies emanating from complex institutions such as the European Union, was designed by a coalition of actors with varying priorities, it should not come as a surprise that it has been claimed to serve multiple functions. It does not mean that the aim of creating pro-European citizens was not central. It is widely accepted that building support for the EU is central to the Erasmus programme's objectives (Féernandez 2005) and it has been an important driver of European involvement in education more generally (Corbett 2005). Whether Erasmus achieves this objective may not be the only possible definition of success, but it is one of several grounds on which the programme can legitimately be evaluated.

Theoretical Expectations

If Erasmus is a mobility programme with a political agenda – to build support for the European Union – this begs the question of how it might achieve this.

The classic approach to studying the political consequences of student mobility tests some version of the assumption distilled by Allport (1958) and Amir (1969) into the contact hypothesis. At its simplest this suggests that when people from one social group (the in-group) are brought into extended personal contact with members of another group (the out-group), under appropriate conditions, their attitudes toward the other group tend to improve. There is an extensive psychological literature on the effects of personally moving across international borders on attitudes to other countries and their nationals which greatly complicates this basic hypothesis. While some researchers have found experimental support for the hypothesis, others have found that the impact is minimal or even harmful. A long list

of caveats has been proposed to the basic hypothesis, suggesting a bewildering variety of circumstances in which the hypothesis cannot be expected to hold (Lee, Farrell and Link 2004: 40-1). It is not safe to assume that any given exchange programme, including Erasmus, will enhance international understanding.

Furthermore, the Erasmus programme differs from most exchange schemes in that its 'political' objective is not to improve relations between in-groups and out-groups but to build support for an institution external to the process. The European Commission does not fund French students to study in Britain in order to improve their attitudes to Britain, but to improve their attitudes to Europe. The European Union is a supranational institution, and "European" is an identity which includes both the in-group (France) and the out-group (Britain) as well as many other identity groups. This pattern of building support for an overarching institution and identity, in which several existing groups share a stake, has much less in common with projects to diminish international tension than it does with the process of state-formation. There have been many historical examples of one state emerging from a fusion of smaller existing communities: the modern United Kingdom from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, modern Canada from English- and French-speaking communities, modern Germany from Prussia, Bavaria, etc. In order to survive, the new entities had to obtain at least some level of support from members of their populations. This does not necessarily mean that Erasmus is intended to create loyalty intense enough to be called "European supernationalism", in Galtung's (1994) memorable phrase, but the creation of support for a political entity which encapsulates students' existing national government along with many others is analogous.

In the European context, the lack of popular support for the Union has been the subject of much discussion (Arts and Halman 2005/6, Scharpf 1999: Ch1). Hix (1999: 38) argues that David Easton's (1975) concept of diffuse support is particularly relevant. Easton

distinguished “diffuse” support from a more self-interested support rooted in the perception that the respondent (or a group with which the respondent identifies) benefits from the institution. Diffuse support is rooted in an attachment to an institution which means individuals will sometimes subordinate their own self-interest for the good of the institution. Taking an extreme example, democrats accept the elections of governments they oppose and do not try to remove them by extra-constitutional means because of diffuse support for the institution. Diffuse support is crucial because it should encourage citizens to support integration which benefits Europe as a whole even if it is not compatible with individual member-state interests.

There is some division in the literature on how far supranational authorities can realistically expect to acquire diffuse support. Deutsch *et al* (1957) claim that supranational integration can be brought about, and that international mobility, particularly of students, is a very important causal factor associated with it. On previous occasions when existing political units have merged into larger communities the process has involved mobility between their populations. Others (e.g. Connor 1972) are more sceptical that mobility contributes significantly to integration. In the context of European integration, Cederman (2001) accepts in principle that loyalties can be shifted, through, for example, mass education, but doubts that Europe can secure them. Member states simply have so much control over the institutions which fix citizens’ loyalties that Europeanising activities (which implicitly seem to include Erasmus) are unlikely to have a comparable impact (Cederman 2001: 158, 162-3).

These ideas of “specific” and “diffuse” support are loosely paralleled by Scharpf’s (1999) distinction between “thin” and “thick” legitimacy. Scharpf, however, emphasises the possibility of securing support for the EU even if citizens do not identify themselves as Europeans. He identifies the EU’s lack of “thick” legitimacy (analogous to “diffuse support”) as an impediment to certain forms of integration, but argues that “thin” legitimacy is still

worth pursuing. Even if people do not feel European, they may still support European integration because they think it will provide benefits to people or institutions with which they do identify: for example, their countries or themselves.

It is possible that Erasmus students come to identify themselves as Europeans or become emotionally attached to Europe, but they may also develop a more calculated belief that European integration makes life better. Erasmus students experience a situation in which the EU's existence enables them to study in another member state far more easily than they otherwise could, and the Commission also provides them with a personal subsidy. This experience of Erasmus could enhance pro-European sentiment without making students feel European simply by exposing them to the benefits of integration. However, if the Union can build only "thin" legitimacy this should lead to support for integration only where it appears compatible with the interests of member states. While an institution possessing "thick" legitimacy or "diffuse" support could be more aggressive in pursuing collective interests, a Union based on "thin" legitimacy would need to be far more careful to respect the perceived interests of member states which enjoy more profound popular support.

It is possible but by no means certain that Erasmus may generate either specific or diffuse support, and we need evidence on whether Erasmus students develop both.

Existing Evidence

It is therefore somewhat disappointing that the existing literature on Erasmus provides limited information about the extent to which participation in the programme influences political values and behaviour. While the review of previous work presented here focuses on studies specifically of Erasmus, similar points could be made about the literature on the political

impact of student mobility more generally. There are many excellent discussions of how Erasmus influences the personal development of students who take part in it (e.g. Murphy-Lejeune 2002). However, these findings do not reflect a concern with the political impact of Erasmus in keeping with the supranationalist, Union-building agenda of (some of) the programme's founders. In order to address this, studies need to directly target the political attitudes and behaviours of Erasmus students. The evidence also needs to move beyond the merely anecdotal, as we already know with some certainty that living abroad *sometimes* changes attitudes, for better or for worse. It is important to find out whether the numbers moving in one direction cancel out those moving in the other, resulting in no *net* change. Only studies based on systematic sampling can really help us address this question.

Of the (relatively few) studies which do draw large samples, most rely on retrospective research designs. These come in two forms, both of which are inherently problematic. One possibility is to compare former Erasmus students with the general population (e.g. ESN 2007). We already know that exchange participants are self-selecting and tend to be relatively cosmopolitan before the exchange (Murphy-Lejeune 2002) and so simply discovering that they have unusual characteristics afterwards is hardly surprising or newsworthy (Demetry and Vaz 2002). Other studies rely on asking former Erasmus students whether, in retrospect, they think their views changed (Teichler and Maiworm 1997: 129-31). This may initially seem a more plausible approach, but in fact there is good reason to doubt the methodological reliability of retrospective designs in general (Bochner 1981: 18). Lamare's (1975) review of educational socialisation studies draws a distinction between those based on asking students whether in retrospect they felt a given experience had influenced them and studies which attempted to measure attitudes before and after. The former are shown to be much more likely to indicate that experiences are influential than 'before and after' designs; students are quite likely to label an experience as influential even when panel studies suggest it is not.

There are good grounds for believing that panel studies in which students are asked the same questions before and after their time abroad provide more reliable evidence. Firstly, respondents' recall of their own opinions in the past may be poor. Expecting them to remember such complex information as the details of their own opinions may be unreasonable, particularly since attitude formation can result from the accumulation of subtle, unremarkable experiences. Secondly, when the issue is presented to respondents in association with the exchange their more general feelings about the exchange may interfere with their judgment. Retrospective studies cannot avoid this association because they are necessarily asking about change during a period in which the exchange almost certainly dominated respondents' lives. Thirdly, respondents have a well-known psychological, possibly subconscious, tendency to present themselves as more intelligent and informed than they really are because they perceive these qualities as socially desirable (Converse 1964, De Vaus 2002: 108, 130). How this affects results is likely to vary according to the types of questions posed. Where the questions are about basic values, social desirability editing might lead them to over-emphasise the consistency of their values over time. However, it is also possible that respondents might wish to be seen as aware of and sensitive to their surroundings, and exaggerate attitude changes that would be expected of an intelligent visitor. With panel studies it is far less likely that they would be able to do so without some conscious effort as this would involve remembering the answers given to questions at the beginning of the exchange, over a year earlier.

A final consideration is that we need to distinguish between developments which are due solely to Erasmus and the impact of simply being a student. Higher education may well influence political development regardless of whether it occurs in a students' home country or abroad (Carlson and Widaman 1988: 3, Jacobsen 2001, Mariani and Hewitt 2008). We can only consider Erasmus an effective intervention if it leads to a change *relative* to students

who remained in their home countries. The obvious way to facilitate such a comparison is to recruit a control group of non-Erasmus students and include them in a panel study along with the Erasmus students.

For the methodological argument presented here to be true, of course, the study has to be a genuine panel study, comparing the same people before and after. One of the larger studies of how Erasmus affects students (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003) is actually an ingenious attempt to simulate a panel study, rather than a genuine panel, and as a result we cannot be sure it is not vulnerable to the problems described. This study questioned a group of graduates who had taken part in the Erasmus programme and then compared their responses with a group of pre-exchange students (who were used as surrogates for younger versions of post-exchange alumni) and non-Erasmus alumni who were used as controls. They infer the impact of Erasmus from the fact that the views of graduates who took part in Erasmus in the late 1980s and 1990s differed from both students about to depart in the early 2000s and alumni who actually did go abroad many years earlier. This technique has obvious weaknesses in addressing the question of political change given the myriad of uncontrolled cohort differences between the generations. For example, the views of British graduates from the 1990s are likely to have been shaped by experiences common to their generation, such as memories of Thatcherism and the Cold War, of which later generations would have little recollection. Simply being much older, on average, may also affect priorities in life. It appears that the use of non-equivalent³ but contemporary control groups is unavoidable.

Emmanuel Sigalas' (2008) study of Erasmus' impact on European identity is, to the best of my knowledge, the only existing study on this subject which comes close to a controlled

³ Due to ethical constraints researchers could never force some students who would otherwise go abroad to remain in their home country as controls, even if this were methodologically more satisfactory.

panel design. As such it represents a significant advance on previous literature. This study questioned three subgroups of students (Erasmus students visiting the UK, British Erasmus students going abroad, and British students remaining in the UK) on their sense of being European. Sigalas included measures of self-identification as a European citizen, pride in Europe, attachment to Europe, trust in other Europeans, closeness to Europeans, whether the respondent believed the current level of European integration was appropriate, and feelings of having “things in common with other Europeans”. He found no evidence that any group became more supportive of further European integration, and Erasmus students who came to the UK actually became less proud of being European. The British students who went abroad did show greater attachment to Europe, contentment with British membership of the EU and more positive attitudes to other Europeans, but confusingly some of these changes were echoed by the control group for no obvious reason (Sigalas 2008: 188-90)⁴. Unfortunately, Sigalas had to distribute many of the first-wave questionnaires when Erasmus students had already arrived in the host country in September or October. By this time they might already have had important socialising experiences and would almost certainly have spent part of their summer educating themselves about circumstances in the host country, which might well have influenced their pretest responses. Many of the second-wave questionnaires were completed immediately when the students returned (Sigalas 2008: 140-2). Students’ attitudes are believed to be particularly likely to fluctuate erratically immediately after the returning from abroad (Klineberg 1981: 125, Useem and Useem 1967), so distributing surveys so soon

⁴ It is difficult to know if some of these were familywise errors. Each statistical test conducted has a fixed probability of generating a type I error, or suggesting there is a significant relationship when in reality there is not. Setting $p=.05$ as the significance threshold, for example, means there is a one-in-twenty chance of a type I error for every test. If the analyst then runs more than twenty tests the odds are that at least one significant result will be incorrectly detected. Reporting this result would be a familywise error.

afterwards may produce results which do not represent the longer-term settling of students' attitudes. The questionnaire was also very obviously focused on Europe, possibly making respondents who had just returned from abroad aware of which responses would be expected.

Nonetheless, Sigalas' findings obviously run counter to conventional wisdom, including the expectations of many of the people involved in creating the programme. This suggests that there is a need to examine the effect of Erasmus further. I aim to provide such an examination, but focus more directly on the possible impact of the Erasmus programme on participants' political views and behaviour. If Erasmus study makes students more likely to provide political support for further integration this has important consequences for the future of European integration. It is also the basis of much support for the programme. Sigalas' study focuses on the impact of Erasmus on students' sense of European identity and touches on their views about European integration. My interest is in more overtly political questions which indicate how far they are likely to provide tangible support for the European project.

Research Design

I conducted a new panel study, of Erasmus students⁵ and a control group of non-Erasmus students, in the 2007-8 academic year. Both groups were asked to complete a questionnaire on their political views and behaviour a few months before the Erasmus students went abroad, and then a second, almost-identical, questionnaire a few months after the Erasmus students had returned. As the questionnaires were so similar, differences in the students'

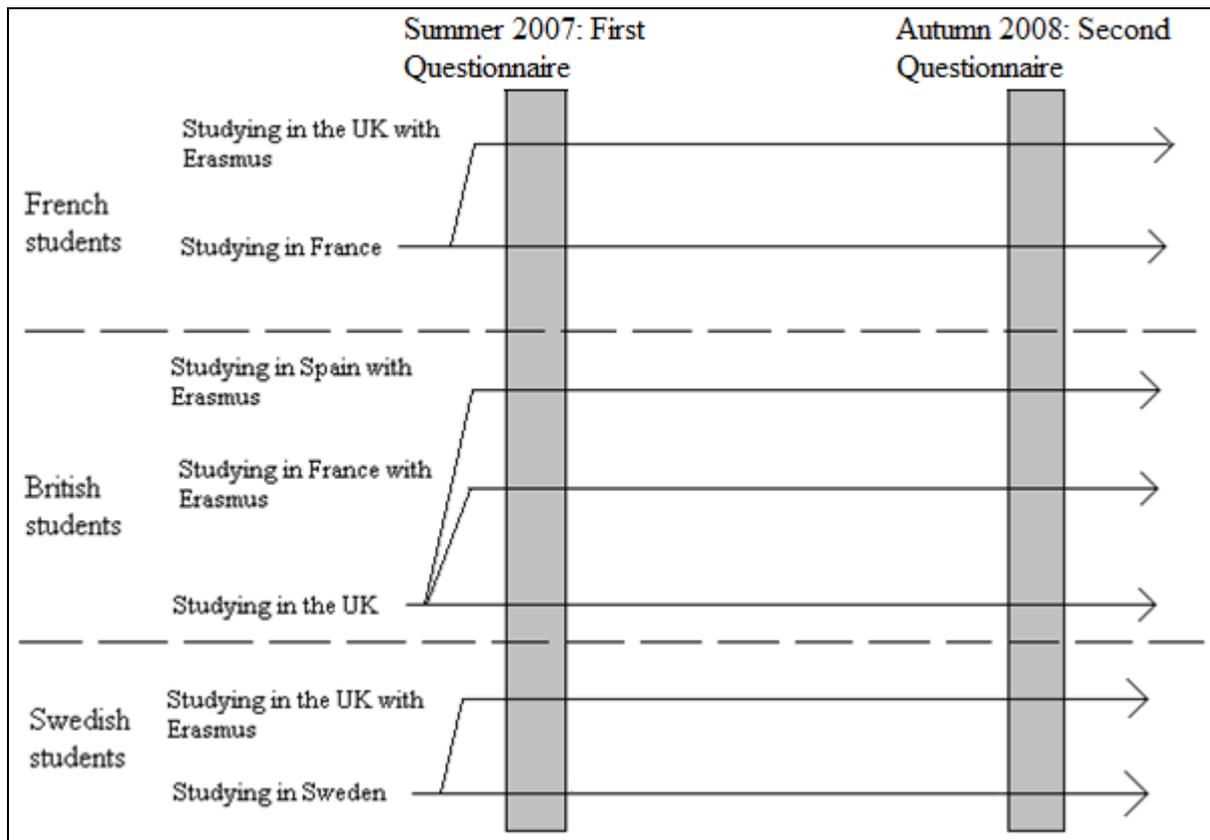
⁵ A small number of undergraduate students on Leonardo work placements during their degrees were included in the Erasmus group; the Leonardo programme is very similar to Erasmus for the purposes of this study.

responses to the two questionnaires could be taken as evidence of changes in views and behaviour over the course of the year.

The Erasmus students included were primarily students of British universities going to France and French university students sojourning in the UK, but smaller numbers of British students studying in Spain and Swedish students studying in the UK were included. These were matched with groups of students continuing their degrees at British, French and Swedish universities who acted as controls⁶. The research design is summarised in Figure 1.

⁶ The Erasmus students were recruited via the international offices of their universities, which agreed to forward standardised e-mails (in English and French as appropriate) directing the students to one of several versions of a survey on the Bristol Online Surveys website, each version corresponding to one subgroup of the sample. The British controls were recruited by a similar process through individual academic departments at the universities of Leeds and Reading, while the Swedish controls were contacted using a list of e-mail addresses provided by the University of Linköping. Due to lack of co-operation from French universities the French controls had to be recruited by distributing personal messages modelled on the invitation e-mails to randomly-selected students at a range of French universities using the Studiqq.fr social networking website.

Figure 1: Research Design



The first questionnaire was open for completion between the 8th of May and 8th of July 2007 while the second was open between the 1st of October and 30th of November 2008⁷. In practice the vast majority of responses were collected early in these windows, which hopefully meant most respondents had not spent too much time mentally adjusting themselves for life in the host country before completing the first questionnaire (which might have affected responses) and allowed them adequate time to settle back into their home countries before completing the second questionnaire.

As with most panel studies, there was considerable attrition between the first and second questionnaires: overall, only 46.9% of the Erasmus students and 54.9% of the control

⁷ The surveys for British students studying in Spain were made available slightly later in the first wave.

students who completed the first questionnaire provided valid responses to the second⁸. However, this still left 99 Erasmus students and 145 controls who completed both. The figures are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Participation rates

Erasmus Students			
	Number completing 2007 questionnaire	Number completing 2008 questionnaire ⁹	Attrition (%)
UK to France	97	56	42.3
UK to Spain	7	3	57.1
France to UK	81	33	59.3
Sweden to UK	26	7	73.1
Total	211	99	53.1
Control Groups			
	Number completing 2007 questionnaire	Number completing 2008 questionnaire	Attrition (%)
UK	189	113	40.2
France	52	20	61.5
Sweden	23	12	47.8
Total	264	145	45.1

⁸ I split the respondents to the first questionnaire into those who did and did not go on to complete the second. Chi-squared tests on the two groups' responses confirmed that the initial views of those students who only completed the first questionnaire do not differ significantly from those of students who completed both.

⁹ The results presented here are based on an analysis from which a few Erasmus students were removed because they were not nationals of the country in which they were studying. There are good theoretical grounds to think such students are less likely to change their views. Repeating the analysis with these students included does not significantly alter the findings.

The sample is thus much smaller than those used in most nationally-representative panels and opinion polls, but it is fairly large compared to many similarly-designed studies in the literature on the political impact of international mobility – and indeed political psychology more generally. When the same subjects are tested repeatedly meaningful conclusions can often be derived from much smaller samples than would be necessary in a single-test design (Bergman and Magnusson 1990: 13-14, Machin *et al* 1997). However, it is still possible that particular subsets of Erasmus students who are over- or under-represented in my sample may react differently to the experience from others. Some caution in extrapolating from my sample to the broader population of Erasmus students¹⁰ is therefore warranted, and replication of the research on a larger scale would therefore be desirable. However the results presented here should give a reasonable indication of the programme's impact.

There were some demographic differences between the Erasmus and control samples. Erasmus students were much more likely to be female, with 27 males to 60 females as opposed to 65 males and 70 females in the control group (each group had 3 non-responses on the gender question). Erasmus students were also from a narrower age range. Although the mean age of an Erasmus respondent was 20 and the mean control respondent 21, the vast majority of the Erasmus students were aged between 19 and 22 while the control sample contained more students who were much younger or older¹¹. However, these differences should not be a cause for concern. The high proportion of women and concentration in the

¹⁰ In the previous academic year (2006-7, the latest for which comprehensive figures are accessible) the Erasmus programme supported 153,396 students from EU member-states (European Commission 2009).

¹¹ The respective standard deviations were 2.878 and 6.193 (for the purposes of this calculation, all respondents over 40 were counted as 41-year-olds). This was because the controls included 20 18-year-olds, 56 19-year-olds and 15 over 26, whereas no Erasmus students were under 18, 21 were 19 and only 2 were over 26.

20-24 age group seems to be typical of Erasmus students in general (Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2007: 8), while age and gender were not correlated with responses on the dependent variables included in this study¹²

The most important independent variable in this study was obviously a dummy (dichotomous) variable which indicated whether the student was an Erasmus participant or a control. This variable was used to split the plot for analysis using the Split-Plot Analysis of Variance technique (SPANOVA, also known as mixed between-within ANOVA). Split-Plot ANOVA divides the data into two groups and then detects convergence or divergence between the group means over time¹³. SPANOVA is used to test three hypotheses for each dependent variable:

1) That there is a significant between-groups main effect. This would mean that the mean responses for Erasmus students were significantly different from non-Erasmus students' mean responses in both 2007 and 2008.

2) That there is a significant within-groups main effect. The within-group variable was time, meaning whether the individual was answering the question in the 2007 questionnaire or the 2008 questionnaire. A significant result would mean the mean responses of all students in 2008 were different from their responses in 2007.

¹² Based on χ^2 tests of gender and linear regressions of age on scores in 2008. The one exception was a slight significant relationship between age and being personally in favour of movement towards political union.

¹³ The approach is slightly different from regression analysis using a dummy independent variable, which may be more familiar to political scientists. Both are implementations of the General Linear Model, and as such there are close conceptual links (see Cohen 1968, Field 2005: 311-2). This form of ANOVA is particularly suitable for a quasi-experimental scenario because it requires only categorical independent variables, in this case which questionnaire the responses come from and whether the respondents are Erasmus students or not.

3) That there is a significant interaction effect. The interaction term is crucial to this study because it shows whether the Erasmus students' views changed *relative to* the non-Erasmus controls. If studying abroad were making Erasmus students more pro-European we would expect a significant interaction term which represented divergence in the responses of the two groups over the course of the year.

As I have demonstrated, the process of coalition-forming which led to Erasmus also led to a certain level of vagueness about what exactly it is expected to achieve. As well as the uncertainty about how far political objectives are central, there is no detailed guidance available about exactly what kinds of pro-European views and behaviour Erasmus may be expected to generate. This means that there was little guidance on what questions I should include as dependent variables. However, the Commission does monitor the attitudes of European publics in general through the Eurobarometer project, and these seem to indicate some of the attitude shifts which are sought in the European population as a whole. Several Eurobarometer questions were used in the study reported here. In addition, I included a question on voting intentions. The rationale for this is that changing future behaviour is necessary to provide material benefits to the pro-European cause; while changes in attitudes may be gratifying, at some point they must be converted into changes in behaviour to have an impact – and this conversion is by no means guaranteed. In Europe's democratic systems the most obvious changes students could make in their behaviour to influence the political process would be to change their voting preferences. Changes in attitudes may be converted into political impact by many routes, including transmission to third parties who then change their behaviours, but direct change in Erasmus students' voting behaviour would be particularly strong evidence.

The dependent variables for this study were derived from students' responses to the four questions most relevant to Europe, placed within a larger questionnaire which was designed

to conceal the survey's focus on attitudes to Europe. The first of these were two questions aimed at broad attitudes to Europe: one was a measure of whether subjects saw themselves as having primarily a European or national identity, while the second measured their level of attachment to Europe. Political behaviour was addressed by asking students who identified themselves as likely voters in a General Election how pro-European they thought their preferred candidate or party was. Finally, respondents were asked how far they were personally in favour of further European political union.

The first dependent variable was based on responses to the question: "Do you see yourself as [your nationality] and not European/more [your nationality] than European/equally [your nationality] and European/more European than [your nationality]/European and not [your nationality]/don't know".¹⁴ This is adapted from a scale which has appeared regularly in Eurobarometer surveys (e.g Eurobarometer 2005: 94-8).

The second dependent variable was based on responses to the question "How attached do you feel to Europe?", to which the accepted responses were "Very attached/fairly attached/not very attached/not at all attached/don't know". Again, a very similar measure has appeared regularly in Eurobarometers (e.g. Eurobarometer 2005: 103-5).

The rationale for including both of these measures was that they could potentially measure slightly different reactions. For example, the Erasmus experience might make some students more outward-looking in general, shifting their attention away from purely local identities toward both national and European ones. Compelling them to consider European and national

¹⁴ Strictly speaking all these variables are measured at an ordinal rather than interval level, and thus may not meet the parametric assumptions for which ANOVA is designed. The use of parametric analyses for such variables is, however, ubiquitous in the social sciences (Garson 2009a). Jaccard and Wang (1996: 2-4) provide part of the rationale for using ANOVA in such circumstances.

identity in opposition to each other was intended to give a measure of the relative importance of the two. These two questions were designed to tap “diffuse support”, which is clearly related to attachment.

The third dependent variable was whether students were likely to vote for pro- or anti-European candidates. The question on pro-European voting preferences was not likely to be relevant to every respondent, because presumably some respondents would not intend to vote. Respondents who were not likely voters were directed not to answer the question by “piping” (De Vaus 2002: 125-6) in the questionnaire. It is therefore worth bearing in mind that only students who answered “yes” to the previous question “If there was a General Election in your country next week, do you think you would vote?” should have scores on this variable. The fact that it had 73 exchangee and 113 control respondents suggests that the vast majority of the sample considered themselves likely to vote. This might represent the impact of social desirability editing or else that students who chose to complete the survey were particularly likely to vote.

Students were asked “Which party, or independent candidate, do you think you would vote for?” immediately before the question on whether they favoured a pro-European party, which is the dependent variable for which results are reported here. This was intended to separate the parties’ attitudes to Europe from the students’ own. The precise wording of the question which is the dependent variable was “Would you say this party or candidate is in favour of or opposed to developments towards a European political union?”. Responses to this question were collected on a 7-point scale: “strongly in favour/in favour/slightly in favour/neutral/slightly opposed/opposed/strongly opposed”. A similar question, referring to personal opinion rather than that of the respondent’s preferred candidate, appeared in Eurobarometer 64 (Eurobarometer 2006: 250).

For the fourth and final dependent variable, respondents were asked to rate themselves on an identical scale in response to the question “Are you in favour of or opposed to development towards a European political union?”, which was also based on the Eurobarometer wording. If responses to this question were to shift while reported attachment to Europe did not, this would imply only specific support for further integration. By allowing for a spectrum of opinion this variable provides much more information than simply asking whether respondents support their country’s membership of the Union (cf. Sigalas 2008).

Results

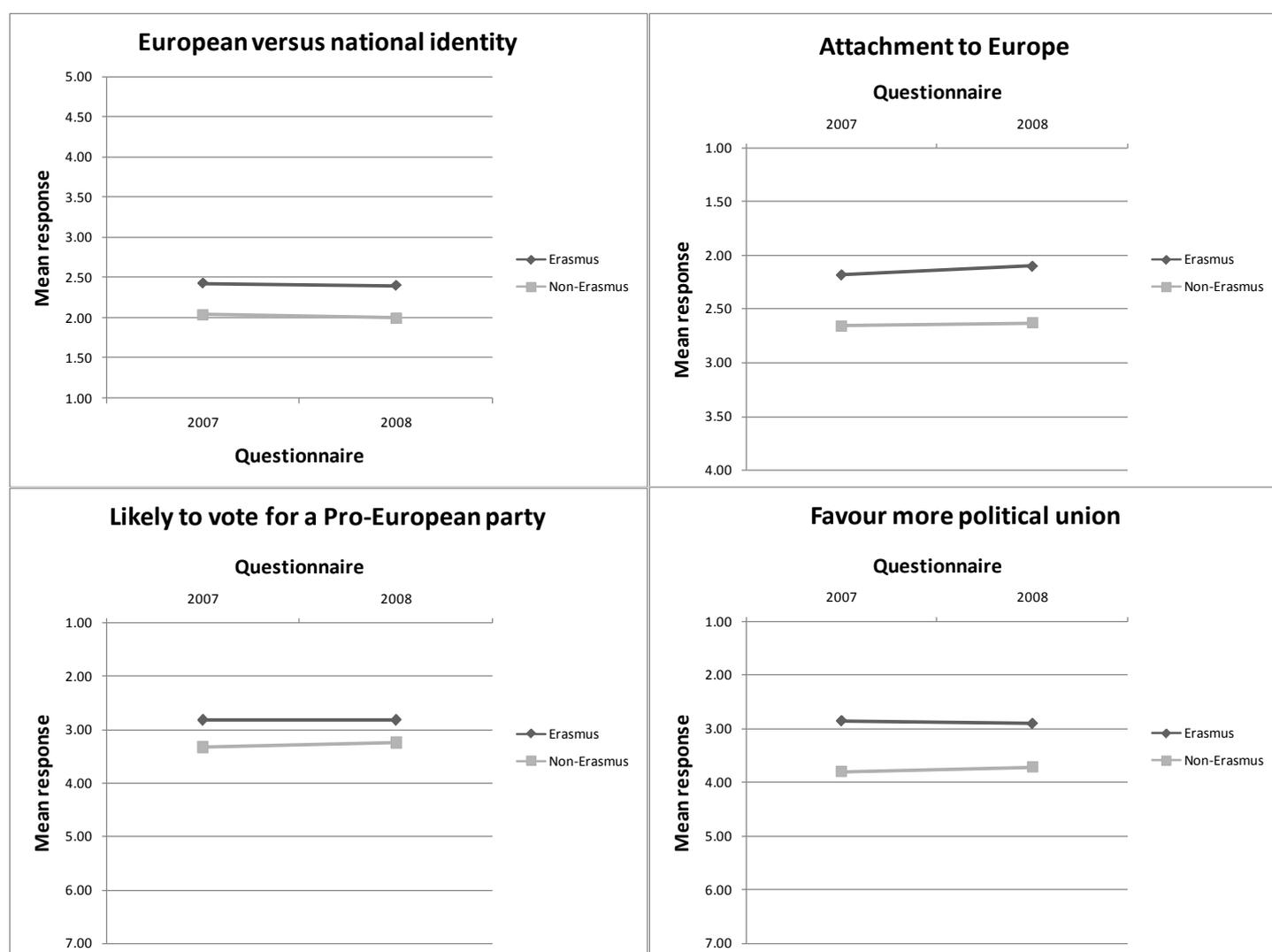
The tables on page 26 show the mean responses for Erasmus and non-Erasmus students on all four dependent variables before and after the academic year. The trend lines for the two groups run roughly parallel, suggesting that the two groups’ views did not diverge dramatically. However, we need to examine the SPANOVA diagnostic statistics to know how confident we can be in this interpretation.

Table 2: Changes in the Erasmus and control students' responses over time

Variable	Questionnaire year	Erasmus students' mean response (standard deviation)	Erasmus N	Non-Erasmus students' mean response (standard deviation)	No
European versus national identity (1 = national, 5 = European)	2007	2.43 (.802)	67	2.04 (.737)	
	2008	2.40 (.799)		2.00 (.711)	
Attachment to Europe (1 = strongest, 4 = weakest)	2007	2.18 (.704)	88	2.66 (.811)	
	2008	2.10 (.788)		2.63 (.815)	
Likely to vote for a pro-European party (1 = most pro-EU, 7 most anti-EU)	2007	2.82 (1.284)	73	3.33 (1.460)	
	2008	2.82 (1.368)		3.24 (1.447)	
Favour more political union (1 = most pro-EU, 7 = most anti-EU)	2007	2.85 (1.369)	88	3.80 (1.758)	
	2008	2.90 (1.373)		3.71 (1.618)	

Source: Author's own data

Figure 2: Mean responses of students in the Erasmus and Non-Erasmus groups.



Source: Author's own data. For ease of interpretation, the 'pro-European' position is always at the top of the scale

European versus national identity

On the first variable (whether students considered their European identity more or less important than their nationality) there was no sign of divergence. The interaction between group and time showed no significant effect, with $F(1, 165) = .011, p = .915$ ¹⁵. These results strongly suggest there was neither divergence nor convergence between exchangees and controls during the study.

The analysis also provides information about whether the students as a whole changed over time. This within-subjects main effect of time was insignificant, $F(1, 165) = .540, p = .463$. On the other hand, the between-subjects main effect of group was significant at $p < .001, F(1, 165) = 13.224$ with an associated effect size (Partial Eta Squared, η^2)¹⁶ of .074, a more-than-moderate effect (Pallant 2007: 208). These results indicate that on average Erasmus students considered themselves considerably more European than control students did, but this was true from the beginning and there was no significant change in either group's position after the exchange period.

Attachment to Europe

The second dependent variable, attachment to Europe, showed a similar pattern. The group/time interaction was not significant, $F(1, 217) = .323, p = .570$. This indicates no significant divergence or convergence in the two groups' attachment to Europe during the year.

¹⁵ F ratios reported here refer to Wilks' Lambda, one of several multivariate tests which can be used to calculate SPANOVA results. All of these lead to the same F ratios and significance figures.

¹⁶ Partial Eta Squared is known to slightly overestimate the effect size in the population (Field 2005:357, 384-5). In this case, slight overestimates are unlikely to affect any of the conclusions drawn and this measure of effect size is convenient when dealing with unequal sample sizes.

For the main effects, the within-subjects (time) effect was also insignificant, $F(1, 217) = 1.057$, $sig = .305$ but again there was a highly significant between-subjects effect (for group), $F(1, 217) = 27.208$, $p < .001$ which represented a substantial effect ($\eta^2 = .111$). Again, exchangees were much more attached to Europe at the start of the study and remained so.

Likely to vote for a pro-European party:

On the measure of voting intentions there was no significant interaction between group and time, $F(1, 184) = .188$, $p = .665$, indicating that exchangees' and controls' voting preferences for pro- or anti-European parties did not converge or diverge.

The figures for the main within-subjects effect of change over time were actually identical to those for the interaction, $F(1, 184) = .188$, $p = .665$; again, there was no evidence of the average position of an Erasmus or a non-Erasmus student changing over time. The main effect for group was significant, $F(1, 184) = 6.232$, $p = .013$, although the effect size for group was relatively small, with $\eta^2 = .033$. In other words, Erasmus students were a little more likely to favour more pro-European candidates at the beginning of my study, and this preference persisted after their time abroad.

In favour of more European political union:

Again, there was no significant interaction between being an Erasmus student (or not) and change over time, with $F(1, 218) = .621$, $p = .432$. There was no sign of convergence or divergence in attitudes to European political union during the year.

There was no significant main effect for time, with $F(1, 218) = .069$, $p = .793$. On the other hand, the main between-subjects effect yielded $F(1, 218) = 19.864$, $p < .001$ with a more-than-moderate effect size, $\eta^2 = .084$. Erasmus students seem to have been noticeably more favourable towards further European political union and remained more pro-European over the course of the study.

On this dependent variable there was a notable violation of the assumption that the error variances of the two groups were equal, and Levene's Test consequently returned highly significant results for both the first and second waves of the survey ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively). Equality of error variances is an important assumption of Split-Plot ANOVA. However, ANOVA can generally tolerate violations of this assumption provided that the sample sizes for the two groups are similar¹⁷, as they are in this case. Given that the p (significance) values for this analysis are all very far from the .05 threshold it seems safe to accept the general pattern of results reported above, that there was no significant change in either group or divergence between them, although the F values may be slightly inaccurate.

Overall, this is basically the pattern we would expect if Erasmus was having no impact. The significant differences in the between-subjects main effects for all dependent variables indicate that there were significant differences between the Erasmus and control students at the beginning of the study. These differences persisted. The fact that none of the interaction effects were significant suggests that there was no convergence or divergence between the two groups over the course of the study. In other words, there is no evidence that being in the Erasmus group, rather than the control group, affected how students' views developed.

Conclusions

The research reported here suggests that the Erasmus experience did not *cause* students to become more pro-European. There was no evidence that Erasmus students increased either

¹⁷ Rough guides to how small the ratios of sample sizes need to be vary between 3:2, as reported in Pallant 2007: 204, and 4:1, reported in Garson 2009: Assumptions.

their diffuse or their specific support for the European Union. There were significant differences between Erasmus and non-Erasmus students, and the Erasmus students tended to be more pro-European. However, this was just as true at the start of the study as at the end, and so these differences cannot be ascribed to the impact of the Erasmus programme. The control group used in this study was not large enough to be a probability sample of the overall non-Erasmus student population, but the pattern I have discovered would be consistent with the Erasmus students having begun with unusually pro-European views and maintained them during their time abroad.

These results provide no support for the hypothesis that taking part in the Erasmus programme leads to revolutionary changes in students' political views in the short term. They tend to suggest that if future 'Erasmus generations' differ from their predecessors it is unlikely to be as a consequence of the programme.

This analysis does not necessarily show that Erasmus has no political impact. Two major issues remain: how far it is possible to generalise from the results, and whether they reflect the long-term consequences of Erasmus.

On the issue of generalisation, it is at least possible that these findings from a sample of British, Swedish and French students are not representative of the broader Erasmus population. These three are geographically close, similarly wealthy, and students can travel privately between them with ease. Relatively large proportions of all three countries' populations tend to eurosceptic positions – in Britain and Sweden majorities have been found to oppose further political integration, while even in France support is below the European average (Eurobarometer 2006: 250). The Erasmus countries are by definition European¹⁸, but

¹⁸ Debatably, in Turkey's case

there are greater differences between some than others. For example, there might be greater impact if the students moved between Eastern and Western Europe, or between particularly europhile and eurosceptic countries, and it would be interesting to see the research repeated with samples from different nationalities. On the other hand, while it is true that this study has focused on students moving between countries which are relatively close and similar, most Erasmus students move between countries which are relatively close and similar, at least in popular attitudes to European integration. In 2006/7 around half of all Erasmus students went to just five countries, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain¹⁹. Similarly, around half of all Erasmus students originated from universities in five countries, in this case France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain²⁰ (European Commission 2009). Apart from Poland, all of them are Western European countries, and these five countries have more similar levels of support for European political integration than do Britain, France and Sweden (Eurobarometer 2006: 250). The similarities between many Erasmus students' home and host countries are further emphasised by the pattern of the largest student flows. Movements between individual pairs of countries which involved over a thousand students in 2006/7 accounted for just under half of total Erasmus mobility that year. All but five of these large student flows were between Western European countries²¹ and all but a handful²² were

¹⁹ These countries received 10.4%, 13%, 11.2%, 9.3% and 17.2%, respectively, of all Erasmus students. In all cases the vast majority were from other EU member-states.

²⁰ These produced 14.4%, 15%, 10.8%, 7% and 14%, respectively, of all Erasmus students; only 4.5% of Erasmus students were students of British universities. Not all of these students were necessarily nationals of the country in which their home universities were based, but most probably would have been.

²¹ Separate statistics are not kept for former East Germany, so it is included in Western Europe.

between two of the top five producing and receiving countries or else between countries which are very close neighbours, such as Spain and Portugal (European Commission 2009, author's calculations). Most Erasmus students, it seems, do not move between countries which are much further apart in geographical distance or levels of support for European integration than Britain, France and Sweden.

There may also be a limit to how much a panel study of this kind tells us about the long term impact of the programme. The survey results indicate respondents' views a few months after their return remained similar to their views a few months before their departure. The lack of observable change during this time-frame seems to make long-term change significantly less likely, but it is not impossible that long-term impact could occur without observable short-term changes. For example, it is at least conceivable that the very few students who develop pro-European sentiments while abroad (and who are 'cancelled out' in this study by students who become more eurosceptic) might go on to become more influential than their peers. Lifetime tracking of alumni would be necessary to rule this out definitively. However, this hypothesis has never been systematically tested – perhaps revealing that the Commission does not expect the impact to occur only over such a long time-frame. So little is known about the long-term impact of Erasmus that neither I nor the sponsors of the Erasmus programme can be confident of knowing how the long-term effect compares to the short-term impact.

My findings are therefore important as well as counter-intuitive. The Erasmus programme has been founded partly on an assumption that Erasmus students will tend to become more

²² The exceptions are students of Belgian institutions going to Spain, Spanish students going to Belgium and the Netherlands, German students going to Sweden and Finland and students of French institutions going to Sweden.

pro-European as a result of their time abroad. The best evidence available is that this assumption is faulty. The findings add to a growing body of evidence that international student mobility does not necessarily lead to support for supranational integration.

This analysis suggests that the hype surrounding the 'Erasmus generation' is unjustified, but it may also distract attention from other goals. There are inevitable opportunity costs to acting as if Erasmus is a means of directly building pro-European sentiment. One possibility is that the talents and resources devoted to running the scheme might be better deployed elsewhere. But many other reasons have been suggested for the Commission to support Erasmus: it may promote the learning of foreign languages and awareness of other European cultures, spread business or policy ideas, allow students to access specialist knowledge unavailable in their own countries, or offer a symbol of European cooperation. All of these could benefit individual Europeans and some might indirectly create support for the European project. If the programme is not directly creating support for the European Union among Erasmus students, making people aware of this may allow them to refocus attention on goods which Erasmus can more effectively supply.

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