(English version)

Question for written answer E-002065/24
to the Commission
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(14 October 2024)

Subject: Scrutiny of EU funding for a university that promotes antisemitism

According to media reports, EU money is going to a university in Türkiye whose rector is known for his anti-Zionist and antisemitic position. We refer in particular to the article published on welt.de on 8 October 2024 under the headline 'Rector incites against Israel — EU co-finances Hamas-friendly university' ([1]). The article refers to relevant quotes and mentions projects that are financially supported by the EU through the Erasmus programme.

1. Did the above-referenced cash flows to the relevant projects actually take place, and what other cash flows have there been from the Erasmus programme or other EU programmes to this Turkish institution?

2. Are those responsible in the Commission and in the Erasmus programme aware that the rector's above-referenced statements are incompatible with any concept of academic integrity and are capable of causing and justifying violence?

3. What measures will the Commission take to reclaim the money already disbursed, and to ensure that this institution and others that lack scientific character or even engage in hate speech are not further funded with EU taxpayers' money?

Submitted: 14.10.2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on behalf of the European Commission
(7 January 2025)

The Commission is bound to ensure that no persons or entities will receive EU funding if they are involved in criminal or unethical practices, terrorist financing, terrorist offences or offences related to terrorist activities, or other activities incompatible with EU values.

To safeguard the proper use of EU funds, various mechanisms framed by the EU Financial Regulation ([1]) and relevant agreements with recipients of EU funds have been put in place ([2]). Entities implementing EU funds also need to comply with EU restrictive measures ([3]).

The recent Financial Regulation recast ([4]) introduced an explicit ground under the early detection and exclusion system, for excluding entities from receiving EU funds, in cases where they have been found to engage in activities contrary to the values on which the EU is founded ([5]), such as incitement to discrimination, hatred and violence ([6]).

Should the Commission become aware of any evidence in this respect, leading to conclude that the exclusion ground indeed applies, it can exclude these entities from EU funding.

Gaziantep Islam Science and Technology University has been a beneficiary of the Erasmus+ programme ([7]). All projects led by this university were selected by the national agency responsible for the implementation of Erasmus+, in line with standard procedures (indirect management). A cooperation project led by this university (involving five other universities) was recently selected for funding ([8]).

The Commission is currently investigating allegations in the press, in close cooperation with the national agency in Türkiye. As a precautionary measure, the Commission asked the national agency to suspend the contracting process for the grant agreement on the recently selected cooperation project mentioned above, until there is more clarity on the matter.

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[1] [1]https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article253897712/Erasmus-Programm-Rektor-hetzt-gegen-Israel-EU-finanziert-Hamas-freundliche-Uni-mit.html.
([1]) Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast), OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024.
([2]) E.g. suspension of contract or payments and contract termination.
([3]) Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.
([4]) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R2509
([5]) These values are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
([6]) Article 138(1)(c)(vi) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509.
([7]) https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/
([8]) With a grant of EUR 250 000.