

Äänitteen nimi: EU_kiinnostaa_jakso2_master.mp3

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Merkkien selitykset:

[?] = sanan kirjoitusasusta ei voi olla täysin varma, mutta merkitys on ainakin sinne päin. Sanan äänityskohta merkitään tekstiin ylös esim. [sana? 00:15:44]

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Speaker 1 [00:00:11]: Welcome to the podcast 'Fascinating EU' by SAMOK. In this podcast, experts and students of EU and educational policy discuss the current EU themes focusing on students.

Speaker 2 [00:00:24]: Perhaps I learned more these, like, meta-skills that we do not always perceive as international competences or skills. For example, in general just being able to plan the travel, and being my own leader.

Speaker 3 [00:00:41]: I learned quite well how the local youth slang and handshakes worked when I came into school. There were these certain routines. We would shake hands and throw a few jokes. I can still recall those memories.

Speaker 4 [00:00:56]: Fascinating EU!

Speaker 1 [00:00:58]: Hi! Our theme of today is the EU of Youth and Students. My name is Roosa Veijola, and today, we have a member of the board of University of Applied Sciences Students in Finland, SAMOK, Miisa Tervola and a member of the board of National Union of University Students in Finland, SYL, Konsta Kouzmitchev as guests at the studio. In the second part of this episode, we will also be joined by Senior Ministerial Advisor Kaisu Piironen, who works at the Ministry of Education and Culture around the topics of higher education policies, and the Erasmus Programme in the EU. But first, welcome to the discussion, Miisa and Konsta!

Speaker 2 [00:01:29]: Thank you so much. It is so nice to be here!

Speaker 3 [00:01:32]: Thank you so much.

Speaker 1 [00:01:33]: First, we could start off by discussing your tasks. Miisa and Konsta, you work in the boards of national student unions as members tasked with international affairs.

That is, national union, international activities. Please, tell us a bit about the nature of international affairs at national unions. Feel free to choose which ever goes first.

Speaker 2 [00:01:57]: Well, at least in SAMOK, our international activities are divided into two paths. We operate through the European Student Union, ESU for short. More about this union in a bit. Then, we also have our own independent activities directed straight at the EU. We have our long-term plan for EU influencing that includes more details on our objectives and what different routes there are to influence things in the EU. This is a fairly new document we just started to utilise. One example I could mention here is meeting the Finnish MEPs and through that, influence the MEPs to include our goals to the agenda in the EU.

Speaker 1 [00:02:42]: Well, how about the situation in SYL, Konsta? Are the activities very similar, or do they differ?

Speaker 3 [00:02:47]: Naturally, it all sounds quite similar. So, a variety of the union's international affairs are my responsibility. These affairs often include EU education policies at the European Student Union, representing Finnish university students, as well as advocating for international students here in Finland. So, my normal day at work can include participation in working groups at ministries, exchanging thoughts between national student unions of our neighbouring countries on recent political events, or just meeting with decision-makers, such as MEPs.

Speaker 1 [00:03:25]: Okay, so the international activities of the two national student unions are quite similar. You both, well, I'm not sure if you both chose this. Well, at least Miisa did mention this European Student Union, that is, ESU, which is the umbrella organisation of both SAMOK and SYL. Through its members, ESU represents nearly 20 million students in the EU. Would you like to briefly describe the kind of work ESU does?

Speaker 3 [00:03:53]: Yes. Well, we at SYL like to think that European Student Union, that is, ESU, is our office for lobbying in Brussels. ESU advocates in EU from the perspective of higher-education students. In practice, the Executive Committee of ESU, that is, the Board together with Presidency and Experts influence the decisions made in Brussels related to student affairs in European institutes. The Committee participates in working groups, observes the development of Bologna Process, and influences the decisions made in international unions through decision-makers and politicians. In addition, ESU represents us on a global level, for example in AMNESTY, the UN, and in the Global Student Forum.

Speaker 1 [00:04:37]: How about you, Miisa? Anything to add?

Speaker 2 [00:04:39]: Yes. I would like to add that ESU also organises these big, European-wide campaigns, to which we also participate from time to time. Naturally, ESU also educates these national unions, such as SYL and SAMOK, and organise events. ESU makes different statements, publications and so on. The activities are very profiled.

Speaker 1 [00:05:07]: What is this Bologna Process? It is an Italian city, at least, but what does that have to do with education?

Speaker 1 [00:05:16]: The Bologna Declaration signed in 1999 started the Bologna Process, which aimed to unify higher education systems in Europe. In practice, this means that the same credit system was implemented in all higher education institutions, and the degrees in different countries would be considered equivalents. The name of the process comes from the meeting in Bologna university, Bologna, at which the declaration was signed.

Speaker 1 [00:05:47]: Today, our topic is the EU of Youth and Students. We will be discussing how EU impacts especially the lives of higher-education students, and the kinds of possibilities EU offers for the students. Often, the tangible aspects within an EU conversation can get lost behind this EU jargon. Now, I would like to discuss what are the most visible ways to influence the student's lives applied by the EU, in your opinion.

Speaker 2 [00:06:16]: Well, I would like to start with saying that the EU does not directly influence the Finnish education policies or legislation, but rather, EU has a complementary competence on the topic. This means that the EU cannot dictate the kind of education Finland should practice. However, there are things in the EU, like the Bologna Process that guarantees that the degrees completed in Europe match each other.

Speaker 3 [00:06:48]: Yes, and I would like to add something and give classic speech. EU policies heavily influence all national decision-making. Up to 70 percent of the Finnish legislation originates from Brussels. Only implementation takes place in the country, which is inevitably too late from the perspective of influencing. Therefore, we must also act on the EU level, even if the EU does not have direct competences in education policies, as Miisa said just now. Then, of course, for the average student, EU is also present in other means than just education policies. For example, free movement and functioning single market also impact the student's daily life.

Speaker 2 [00:07:36]: Yes. I would like to add one thing. I think the most prominent aspect for Finnish higher-education students is the Erasmus+ Programme. The programme funds the student exchanges for Finnish students, and they also organise funding for different organisations to act internationally. I am sure everybody knows this programme. But more on that later.

Speaker 1 [00:08:01]: Yep. So, in practice and from the EU perspective, directing the funding is important for students, isn't it?

Speaker 2 [00:08:09]: Yes, that is right.

Speaker 1 [00:08:11]: Well, one trend related to internationalisation of students is the reducing number of Finnish students heading out for a study exchange period since 2016. Consequently, on the EU level, a new, 7-year budget has been devised for the EU, called multiannual financial framework. Such a word monster. MFF in short. During these negotiations, the budget for Erasmus+ Programme was nearly doubled for the next 7 years of the programme. As a

disclaimer, I might have to state that the objective of the student movement and the European Parliament was to triple the budget. So, we fell a bit short in that sense. However, we did manage to reach a little less than doubling the budget, increasing the budget. What do you think? Will this change things on a practical level in Finland, to where the number of student exchanges starts to increase once again?

Speaker 3 [00:09:12]: Yes, well, I would like to start with a comment on the reduced number of student mobility and its downturn. The downturn began after 2016, as you mentioned, and that really is no wonder. In 2017, there were these harsh cuts targeted on education, which caused the universities to reduce the number of staff. This, then, impacted the number of available services and support for students to apply for exchange studies. Then, the student financial aid was also cut for nearly 100 euros, meaning that the students could not afford to apply and leave for a student exchange abroad like before. Then, naturally, this Covid-19 has impacted mobility quite a bit, but the trend has caused concern for quite a while before Covid. I cannot necessarily see the trend taking that big of a turn after Covid.

Speaker 2 [00:10:04]: Well, from the perspective of the students at universities of applied sciences, it depends how the additional budget is being targeted. At least the new programme highlights that the programme would be expanded for a larger group of students, and it would acknowledge the different financial and life situations. For example, every fourth UAS student has children, and this is guaranteed to influence the decision to go on an exchange period. It is a whole different question for those with families to plan a 6-month period abroad compared to those students living on their own. I believe that if the funding is targeted accordingly, let's say on these social aspects, I am certain that it would, at the very least, help the decision to leave for a student exchange, thus enabling a better recovery after Covid.

Speaker 1 [00:11:00]: Yes. So, based on the conversation, we could conclude that relieving the financial pressure and the pressure of graduating early, and having a variety of available possibilities for going on a student exchange in different living situations are crucial aspects.

Speaker 3 [00:11:17]: Well, I would like to add one thing, and that is planning. Indeed, Eurostudent survey asked why students did not take a student exchange period abroad. In addition to subsistence, the answers emphasised coordination of studies and the lack of information in higher-education institutions. So, in practice, I can even give a personal example. When I wanted to go on an exchange period, I had to plan that a year in advance. First, I had to plan the coordination of the student exchange with my own studies and the credit transfer of the modules. Then came all the application processes. First, I had to apply for the university abroad, then I had to get the position at my own university. A challenging part of all this is the bureaucracy. One mystery related to this subsistence part is the Erasmus grant, and how few people apply for that grant. The grant levels vary from 300 to 500 euros per month, depending on the level of your own subsistence. However, surprisingly few people apply for the grant. About a third of Finnish students that head for a student exchange applies for the grant, although subsistence is one of the biggest reasons why students are not going on an exchange period. If you are listening to this and you are going or planning on going on an Erasmus exchange, remember to apply for the grant!

Speaker 1 [00:12:48]: Yes. And I think it is also good to remember that generally, the grant usually refers to student exchanges, but you can also apply for the grant in case of traineeships abroad. Grant is an essential help when moving abroad. Even if you have a paid traineeship, the grant is a significant sum of money for a student.

Speaker 2 [00:13:13]: If I can just mention something as a summary. Although the budget was doubled, Finland must still do its own part. Erasmus+ cannot fix everything, if the students are faced with the financial pressure and the pressure of graduating due to the way things have been organised in Finland.

Speaker 1 [00:13:36]: Actually, it would be interesting to know if you have been on an exchange or traineeship period abroad. If you have, what was the experience like for you?

Speaker 3 [00:13:46]: Well, I did a year-long student exchange in Germany when I was in upper secondary. It was, in many ways, a unique way of being in a new country, living with a new family, without knowing anyone or the language that well. At the end of the year, I realised I had an entirely new life from scratch with friends, stories, and language skills. I can recommend it to anyone, and I do plan on going on an exchange period during my university studies.

Speaker 1 [00:14:13]: Indeed. So, the last interview for Konsta will be conducted in German! [laugh]

Speaker 2 [00:14:16]: [laugh]

Speaker 3 [00:14:17]: [laugh] Well...

Speaker 1 [00:14:18]: Too bad I am not that good with the language. Well, how about you, Miisa?

Speaker 2 [00:14:23]: Yes, I was on a traineeship in the United States. We just talked about how the Erasmus+ Programme also supports traineeships. So, a couple years ago, I left for the United States to work as a camp counsellor for a summer camp. I had found the location myself, but my school did support the process, so I was able to get a grant and transfer the credit for the internship, and so on. The experience taught me a lot, and perhaps the biggest reward of the process was the realisation of how different a work culture abroad can be. Finland has made me used to excellent things. I had an intensive three-months in the camp.

Speaker 1 [00:15:07]: Yes. Well, people often talk about international skills that you get from student exchange or traineeships abroad, or from similar experiences. However, these skills have not been defined accurately, or, at least, the definition of these skills depend on the context. Many people seem to have an idea about what these skills are. So, what do you think you have received from these exchanges and traineeships, specifically? You already briefly mentioned some things about it, but if we focus on these skills, specifically?

Speaker 2 [00:15:41]: Well, the most obvious outcomes are the stronger language skills. I was able to encounter the other culture and I learned a lot of it. However, I do think that the thing I learned the most were these meta-skills that we do not always perceive as international competences or skills. For example, in general just being able to plan the travel, leading myself, and coping with a stressful situation. I also became more independent during that experience.

Speaker 1 [00:16:12]: How about you, Konsta?

Speaker 3 [00:16:14]: Well, that was a comprehensible answer with meta-skills and so on. I will just highlight the communication, communication and interaction in an international environment, starting from me learning quite well how the local youth slang and handshaking worked when I came into school. There were these certain routines. We would shake hands and throw a few jokes. I can still recall those memories.

Speaker 1, 2, 3 [00:16:38]: [laugh]

Speaker 1 [00:16:44]: That is great. Well, would you like to talk about another topic? Which proven, practical benefits from participating, for example, in an Erasmus exchange are there?

Speaker 2 [00:16:53]: Well, it has been proven that you have better chances to find employment if you have participated in an exchange. Studies have measured that, let's say, three years after graduation, you still have better changes for employment. I do believe that you can achieve these working-life skills. However, we can also discuss whether this a cause or an effect. Are those participating in an exchange these people that can take the plunge, people that can manage these huge elements?

Speaker 1 [00:17:26]: Yes, you make an excellent point. However, international skills are valued in working life, as studies have clearly indicated. Next, would you like to talk about the things EU offers for young people not studying in a higher-education institution?

Speaker 3 [00:17:42]: Yes. Indeed, there is this DiscoverEU initiative, where 18-year-olds can get to know Europe by travelling on a train. In practice, we organise a competition twice a year where you can apply for a DiscoverEU travel pass. You can win these so-called Interrail passes from these competitions. I just must mention that I wish I was 18 when this initiative came out, but it was a couple years too late.

Speaker 1 [00:18:09]: I have the same wish. I went Interrailing, so it would have been nice to do that for free!

Speaker 2 [00:18:15]: [laugh]

Speaker 3 [00:18:16]: So, to those 18-year-olds listening to this podcast, send in your applications!

Speaker 2 [00:18:22]: Well, I would like to highlight the European Solidarity Corps, something that was new to me, too. I had not heard of this before. Basically, you can participate in this voluntary work, which is something between a traineeship and an employment contract. You receive a small compensation, and there are locations all over Europe. Different projects that can range from maintaining a café to going to a farm to work. These are usually social projects that somehow help the local community. These projects can be short-term, or you can sign up for a year. You do receive a small compensation. So, if this interests you, our listeners, go ahead and apply! I checked it out, and there is a huge range of possibilities available. Of course, Covid-19 has reduced those numbers, too, but still.

Speaker 1 [00:19:14]: Yes. We have given many tips for young people. Go ahead and take these opportunities! You can talk about your experiences to us. You can send DMs to the inboxes of SAMOK and SYL and describe your experiences! As we have mentioned, EU has a lot to offer for both students of higher-education institutes as well as for other young people. However, not that many young people know about these opportunities, and in general, EU can feel a bit distant. People often talk about EU like 'yeah, it's somewhere there, in Brussels where people make the decisions, and those decisions don't really matter to us, or we have no say in these decisions, at least.' However, we Finns are all citizens of the European Union. EU influences our lives in a multitude of ways. In this section, we have only discussed education. Well, we did mention the single market and free movement, but there are so many other sectors that the EU uses to influence the lives of students and young people. In your opinion, what causes people to lose or lack interest in the EU? What could we do to change this? This is somewhat of an age-old question.

Speaker 3 [00:20:29]: Well, I am certain that it is a sum of many things. I would personally guess that many adolescents consider EU to be a self-evident unit. We have been born to a ready-made world, whose existence is a self-evident fact. If EU were to disappear, taking with it free movement, single market, and other European values, many would become interested again, especially if we are to compete with large nations over large aspects and innovations. The European Union would once again increase its value to unmeasurable heights.

Speaker 1 [00:21:11]: That is a great way to put it.

Speaker 2 [00:21:12]: Yes, I was about to say the exact same thing! The youth of today, me included, cannot remember the time before EU. So, maybe people don't think it is necessary to impact the EU that much. However, I also think that the issue with local politics applies to this situation as well. It is not like local politics interests young people that much. In a way, EU is becoming this high-level operation. So, if we cannot communicate the actions of a municipal council or the Parliament of Finland to the youth in an interesting way, how could we do that for the EU?

Speaker 3 [00:21:54]: Yes, and I do believe that by actively bringing up EU in a conversation in a determined way through themes that interest the youth, and by being more present in social media through different communication stunts could grasp the attention of young people. One

good example and a place for this is the Conference of the Future of Europe, happening right now. CoFoE, among friends.

Speaker 1 & 2 [00:22:20]: [laugh]

Speaker 1 [00:22:22]: Precisely, among friends!

Speaker 3 [00:22:25]: Yes, correct! And in that conference, people encourage citizens to participate in different events and engage in discussion about the future of the European Union. It is a great place to try out different ways and methods to speak and address young people. So, in SYL, we have been thinking ways to get university students to vision how the Europe is going to look like in 2030 or 2040, or how the education is going to look like in the future. The main thing is to envision. Authorities and politicians will do the rest. There is no law, or... I mean that everything is possible! Carrying out these is going to demand some damn complex legal documents, but that is not our concern.

Speaker 1 [00:23:05]: The "damn" is going to be receiving the BLEEP!

Speaker 1, 2, 3 [00:23:07]: [laughs]

Speaker 2 [00:23:09]: Actually, I just remembered something. Members of the European Parliament are considerably older than, for example, local politicians. For instance, we had Alviina Alametsä as a guest earlier on this podcast. They are the youngest MEP in Finland, and I think they might even be... not Europe's...

Speaker 1 [00:23:26]: One of the youngest MEPs. I am not quite sure about the statistics, but...

Speaker 2 [00:23:30]: Yes. So, in a way, if we could get younger decision-makers in there as well, these people could reach people in a different way, some do utilise social media. Alviina has, for example, a YouTube channel, you should check it out! Alviina practices a lot of this kind of communication to try and get young people interested in the topics. I do think that has a great impact on the situation.

Speaker 1 [00:23:51]: Yes. One clear way where young people can influence decision-making is, of course, the elections to the European Parliament. However, young people are the least active group of voters in European Parliament elections, which is paradoxical in a way, because young people are the most positive group towards the European Union. One of the reasons for this could be the fact that the benefits of the EU are seen as a self-evident fact for the young generation, as Konsta highlighted earlier. How could we increase the voter turnout?

Speaker 2 [00:24:28]: Well, I believe many of the things we mentioned earlier apply in this situation as well. So, by bringing that decision-making closer, and making the activities of the people in the EU clearer. For many young people, it might feel like the EU is just rolling along, regardless of who is making the decisions. For example, I do not think that many young people

know about the political groups in the EU, and to which political groups the Finnish political parties fall under.

Speaker 3 [00:25:01]: Yes, and as mentioned before, we need to have young candidates that discuss important themes and things that impact the future with young people. Currently, important topics include the climate crisis, mental health, and, of course, European values that are currently being tested even in European nations.

Speaker 1 [00:25:21]: Next, let's direct our gaze to the future and where the European educational policies and initiatives are headed. We are joined by Kaisu Piironen, welcome along!

Speaker 4 [00:25:36]: Yes, thank you for the invitation!

Speaker 1 [00:25:38]: Kaisu, you work at the Ministry of Education and Culture, focusing on higher-education policy, and especially on the Erasmus+ Programme. Would you like to describe your work to us in detail?

Speaker 4 [00:25:52]: Yes, it would be my pleasure. Your description hit the nail on the head. Lately, my work has focused strongly on issues related to international students and different themes. Of course, lately we have been cooperating a lot with student organisations on issues related to Covid-19. We have been discussing these topics. Then, I am also participating in the Erasmus+ Committee on behalf of my organisation, specifically as a participant and as a representative of higher education. Back in the day, negotiations on the Erasmus programme period that started on 2021 took place during Finland's presidency. I participated in these programme negotiations. In addition, there are other tasks related to immigrants with higher-education backgrounds and general analytics, information gathering, and supporting knowledge-based management. However, many aspects are related to international students.

Speaker 1 [00:26:56]: Well, EU finished negotiations on this new multiannual financial framework, which is a long-term budget for the years 2021–2027, as well as this new programming period for Erasmus+. Earlier, we already discussed that the budget for the programme was nearly doubled. However, Kaisu, would you like to share details of what this new Erasmus+ programming period includes compared to the previous period?

Speaker 4 [00:27:25]: As you mentioned, the budget increase was extremely significant. If we consider the previous programming period, we already had a budget increase. So, we kind of climbed the stairs. Naturally, Covid-19 did mess with the last years of the programming period and impacted mobility to an extent. We are in this junction point between two programming periods. Of course, the most important thing, especially at the beginning of the new programming period, has been that certain continuum from where we started. Those basic pillars remained the same. Those basic operations of Erasmus are elements related to supporting mobility and different international cooperation. However, one thing that is completely new are these very strong participatory and inclusion themes. The attempt is to locate those participants that have not been able to benefit from or participate in the activities

of the programme before. In addition, this general, sustainable, and green development that might not be that visible at the moment, but it will become more evident as the programming period proceeds. Of course, this general digital buzz and the possibilities of digitalisation as a supporting element for mobility will increase. As a more practical approach, and something that has been the focal point, we have piloted a few activities: the European Universities Initiative, Centres of Vocational Excellence, and DiscoverEU activities, a period of familiarisation to Europe aimed at 18-year-olds, an initiative aimed for adolescents. Previously, these have been tested out as pilot projects, and now, these initiatives are merging with the Erasmus Programme. It was proven that these projects are great and worth the development, and so, we wanted to integrate these as permanent parts of the programme. Then, a completely new element is introduced. Erasmus Teacher Academy, a network for teacher education, which has not yet been concretised, but there have been discussions on how the network is going to function. This is a clear, novel, and fascinating network-like structure that aims to unify and bring together teacher education in the EU to an extent. Then, since we are listing completely new elements, we are integrating global cooperation to vocational education, which has not been done before. In addition, we are enabling the movement of an individual in adult education, as well for sports. By this, I mean that not all athletes, but rather the sports staff can move around through the means of individual mobility. I think these might be the key elements. If we think about it, the programming period lasts for seven years, so I am certain something new and exciting will be included as we go ahead.

Speaker 1 [00:30:39]: Well, do you have anything to add to Kaisu's perspective on the new Erasmus programme, Miisa and Konsta? How does the programme look like to you?

Speaker 2 [00:30:46]: I already talked about the inclusivity before. That is such a great thing, and I am sure that is going to be applied for the UAS side as well.

Speaker 3 [00:30:57]: Yes, and the nearly doubled budget, green approach, and focusing on accessibility are excellent additions to the programme from SYL's perspective. Naturally, constructive criticism and causes for concern are always needed. For example, the question regarding Erasmus funding is 'where should the funds be invested?' The objective of the programme is to increase international mobility, but the funds can be invested in so many different ways. In addition to these mobility projects and initiatives, this new programme, the European Education Area, or EEA, was established. EEA includes these European higher education networks. So, in our opinion, the primary objective of the Erasmus programme is to promote student mobility, and therefore, the funds should be directed towards students and aspects related to student mobility, not to structural changes. However, that initiative also sounds fascinating, so we are following the development with a keen eye.

Speaker 4 [00:31:53]: Yes, and perhaps I could comment on that. That is correct, mobility and the different forms of mobility are the number one thing. Now, since we want and are participating more, this is also a challenge for the national level. We have noticed that the mobility of higher-education students and the willingness of students to leave for a mobility period have been on the decline in a way. So, since we are receiving more money for mobility, how can we genuinely include or mobilise those people that might have not found the

possibility or considered an Erasmus mobility period as their own thing? The fact is that you can spend a shorter period or utilise hybrid forms, meaning that physical mobility is complemented by this mobility enabled by digitalisation. So, in a way, we need to consider and enable possibilities for underrepresented groups to head out. In my opinion, this should also be considered in all communication. For example, the Erasmus catalogue needs to acknowledge this, as the catalogue might not have necessarily addressed us all. However, just a short comment on Konsta's statement. These strategic partner projects have been around before, projects like the European Universities, and these have been acknowledged in the budget allocation. Therefore, these partner projects do not consume funding from mobility, but rather have their own set of money that have been used for partnerships or policy support. So, I do agree that mobility is priority, but these projects are also beneficial. However, the amount of money allocated for other projects in the budget is also a great question.

Speaker 1 [00:33:44]: Yes. Well, there are several new initiatives related to educational policies in the EU. One of the reasons behind these initiatives is Brexit, that is, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. Kaisu, could you tell us about your perspective on how Brexit has impacted, or is still going to impact the European educational policy?

Speaker 4 [00:34:05]: Well, this is great question indeed. I am certain this is something each Member of the EU is thinking about on their own. How will Brexit change the situation, and how do we need to change the national treaties? So, previously, the relationships with the UK have been easy, in a way. If we think about it, the UK has been a part of our common EU and Erasmus Programme. However, about Brexit's impact on Finland. The UK has been one of the most popular student exchange destinations of Finnish higher-education institutions, and in a way and based on some surveys, UK has been perceived as an easy destination for student mobility, since the language element comes easy for Finnish students, and people know what they are getting. However, how will Brexit impact the future? It is... That is a great question, and if we think about the European Universities initiative, which was sparked by Macron's speech reacting to Brexit. The concern was raised about the top universities of the United Kingdom leaving the common EU, or EU's shared common good, so how should we react to that? Well, it is clear that we have to think about our relationship with the UK in our national education policy and in everything else as well. Since we have these bilateral relationships with the United Kingdom, how high will we estimate the relationship to be? I cannot say anything for certain, about what that relationship is going to be and how it is going to look like. However, we already know that the higher-education institutions have already been in touch through these bilateral projects. So, in a way, it has been deemed important to maintain the relationship because we know the UK is an important partner for us. However, what is national, and what is left for the individual higher-education institution regarding the relationship with the UK? That is a great question, indeed. This went around a bit, I can tell my answer was not that clear [laughs]. Still, this was my comment in short.

Speaker 1 [00:36:34]: Yes. Well, this is a complex issue. The answers for complex issues are often complex itself.

Speaker 5 [00:36:49]: As I was doing my dishes, I started wondering that when we discuss the EU, all kinds of abbreviations are often flying around. I confuse these abbreviations with one another. What have EEA and EUJ to do with students, again?

Speaker 1 [00:37:03]: The European Education Area, that is, EEA, is one of the new education policy initiatives of the European Commission. The Commission has proposed the establishment of the European Education Area by the year 2025, and one of the objectives of the initiative is to promote mobility through expanding participation in the Erasmus programme. The objectives of the Education Area include making studies abroad as a self-evident fact, the recognition and acknowledgement of degrees all across Europe, and acquiring language skills in at least two other languages besides the student's first language. Another significant initiative is the founding of European Universities, that is, the European Universities Initiative. The network of European Universities consists of international partnerships established by the institutions themselves, and the initiative plays a crucial role in building the European Education Area by the year 2025. This means that the two initiatives are closely related. After two application rounds, the initiative includes 41 networks in total. Finnish higher-education institutes participate in 11 networks.

Speaker 1 [00:38:10]: One relatively new initiative is the European Education Area, EEA, which is aimed to be established by the year 2025. Another significant initiative is the founding of the network of European Universities, which includes 41 networks already just after two application rounds. Kaisu, how are these initiatives seen on a practical level in the life of a higher-education student?

Speaker 4 [00:38:38]: Yes. Let's separate two things: how are these initiatives seen now, and in the future, after the initiatives are fully established and running. The discussions about the European Education Area have been going on for quite a while already. The objective is to enable the student to move freely within the Education Area, as well as promoting the availability of the offering by the higher-education institutions. Perhaps the most evident, or most focal factor, or key initiator in this is the network of European Universities you just mentioned. The Ministry and the Finnish National Agency for Education have cooperated a lot with the Finnish higher-education institutions that are participating in these networks. Finland has been represented in a great way in these networks, and that is a cause for national happiness. We also got universities of applied sciences included in the second application round, which is such a great thing. About these networks and the Finnish higher-education institutions participating in them. The networks do take a different direction. I mean, the development of the networks takes a different turn from the starting point. Of course, we should remember that there are groups in the background of some of the networks that have cooperated for a long time. So, these networks do not need to have the same conversations these brand-new networks are having, networks that were created just for this initiative. However, the way these networks are present in the life of a higher-education student depends on the emphasis of the network. In general, these networks include quite intense mobility objectives. The idea is that higher-education mobility becomes a daily element, to which all members of the network participate in. In addition, the networks include flexible offering of studies or modules from all network participants, be that a university or a UAS. In addition, the

expertise and competences of the staff in the network should be available for all, meaning that lectures and courses could be completed in a flexible way. Furthermore, all this flexibility and wide education offering requires functioning online and digital solutions. At some point, we will also reach the legislative questions: if you are a Finnish higher-education institution, but also a part of this international network, what are your... I mean, of course we know that this falls under the jurisdiction of Finnish law, but which are the questions solved within that network, and what are those that need to be solved on a national level? However, I think the question of how the Area is present in the life of a higher-education student would be best answered by the student representatives of these networks. We have had great discussions with some of these student representatives on the impact of these networks now and in the future, once the networks function at full capacity, and after we are done with Covid-19. Once the short-term mobility and cooperation is genuinely and truly possible. Now, mobility has experienced difficulties and clumsiness, and has been very limited.

Speaker 1 [00:42:47]: Thank you. Konsta and Miisa, what are the thoughts of SYL and SAMOK? How do the initiatives such as the European Education Area and the network of European Universities look like?

Speaker 3 [00:43:00]: I like to envision. So, how will studies look like, if the schedule for the period included courses from French and Bulgarian universities in addition to courses offered by my home university? I think this is a fascinating project. Then, there are these digital opportunities as a replacement for traditional mobility. Basically, I agree with Kaisu's statement, making higher-education mobility a daily thing. We could approach the objective where each student would participate in an international module, or we could have this platform-like, European solution where students can have an easier way of participating and acknowledging courses from universities abroad. In addition, securing a student representation in higher-education institution networks and in all administrative structures is also a crucial aspect. Currently, this objective is actualised relatively well, but we must remember to acknowledge this in the future as well.

Speaker 2 [00:44:08]: Once again, Konsta took the words out of my mouth. I would have emphasised the significance of student representatives in this context. For example, the European Students' Union is also working on this dimension. Furthermore, from the perspective of a student activist, I find these new locations for student representation just wonderful. These areas or sectors of influence. Naturally, increasing internationality is important for the average student, but also the improvement of education quality. I think this is an enormous background objective.

Speaker 1 [00:44:44]: Indeed.

Speaker 4 [00:44:45]: Yes, about that...

Speaker 1 [00:44:46]: Go ahead, Kaisu.

Speaker 4 [00:44:46]: That was a great highlight, Miisa. Internationalism is not an intrinsic value on its own at all. Internationalism enables us to reach a higher quality, and cooperation generates all kinds of good things. Observing these networks and having these conversation events where these old-timers that have worked on international cooperation in higher-education institutions nearly their entire careers, you can just see the passion in their eyes. Like, 'we have never collaborated like this! I have been working on the same thing for 25 years. This is completely new; we are not working on a project; we are working on something bigger!' It is so lovely to hear this as well. People have jumped on board, and the excitement just comes across, and you cannot stop it. I am certain that this kind of enthusiasm will be echoed on all activities, too.

Speaker 1 [00:45:43]: Having that kind of new excitement is definitely a good sign! That will most certainly lead to great results. Next, we can detect trends like digitality, green transition, and continuous learning from these initiatives that we just discussed. Kaisu did mention these trends earlier. So, in your opinion, will these trends continue to be the key factors in European education policies in the future, or can we expect new elements and dimensions to surface?

Speaker 4 [00:46:17]: Yes. Maybe... The use of the word 'trend' in this context got me thinking. Those elements you mentioned are our focus areas for the entire EU framework. Educational policy is not a separate part, but rather follows the same guidelines as the EU framework. So, what could be added to those elements? Continuous learning is a great one, and it is strongly present in the educational agenda, but also in the employment sector and in its varied initiatives as micro-credentials, aka smaller competence units. In Finland, we have discussed how to move away from degree requirements, degree-focused approach, and degree demands towards an emphasis on competence and competence needs. If I am to mention a few global trends or influences, population growth and this need of agility are definitely going to impact the situation. We must be able to update our competences when we are faced with new situations, whatever it may be. However, in addition to those two elements, it is a bit difficult to anticipate anything else. I will just mention that I think this digital aspect will become more integrated to other elements. Digital aspect will not be standing alone. Just like current internationality, the digital element will become a cross-cutting factor in all elements and integrated in everything. In my opinion, this digital aspect should reach a better synergy with these 'substance' initiatives. There should not be a separate digital development, but rather, digital development should be connected to something else. That is a great element, and I am happy that discussions on sustainable development, green, and these varied opportunities are already happening. Discussions on whether the attempt of increasing mobility is sustainable, if we do not evaluate how to do this in a more sustainable, and perhaps a new way. However, this is not happening in a vacuum. Initiatives are always driving to react to future obstacles. Then, about the Erasmus programme. Some parts of the programme are annual. There is the programming period, which lasts for seven years. However, during the programming period, these prioritisation discussions are happening. For example, how to react to these varied aspects, such as terrorism attacks or inequality processes. When the number of asylum seekers increased significantly in 2015 and 2016, the way that the Erasmus programme embraces this phenomenon and analyses how to react, support, and ease the situation was significant and a

great element in my opinion. However, I am, unfortunately, unable to predict new megatrends, but I feel like these current ones [laughs] work just fine.

Speaker 1 [00:49:28]: [laughs] EU has supporting competences in education policies, meaning that EU will only support, coordinate, and complement the Member State's operations and actions in education policy. As we have discussed, new initiatives are suggested by the Commission. Kaisu, how likely is an increased transference of power from the Member States to the EU? This will not happen on its own, but if all Member States agree, how would it go?

Speaker 4 [00:50:03]: Yes, well. That is a great question, and people do 'flirt' with the idea from time to time. When these recovery packages were discussed, the public debate did turn to discussing 'the direction we are heading'. However, I can answer with a conviction that the national competence on education policy is based on EU's founding agreements. Changing that fact has never been on EU's agenda, not in any way. As you mentioned, changing these elements would always require unanimity, which has not been so easy to attain in any issue recently [laughs]. A situation where all Member States would wish this to happen feels very unlikely. But, of course, cooperation is constantly tightened in accordance with the current framework. It is possible to view the transference of power increasing due to these new EU initiatives, but the demand for unanimity... Maybe an interesting aspect caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is this policy of soft law. In a way, it feels like education was raised alongside healthcare as policies of soft law to the EU agenda. This was clearly visible in the EU decision-makers' conclusions. But... things got a little off topic there, but I do not think we are headed in this direction. Of course, this conversation will always be relevant when new hard agendas are introduced. Where are the decisions made?

Speaker 1 [00:51:51]: Yes. Today, we have discussed adolescents and students, the way EU influences these groups and what is the EU's education policy like. Thank you so much, Konsta, Miisa, and Kaisu, for the discussions. It was great to have you here!

Speaker 3 [00:52:08]: Thank you for the invitation.

Speaker 2 [00:52:10]: Yes, thank you!

Speaker 4 [00:52:11]: Yes, thank you! It feels like we could have carried on! I felt like I was just getting warmed up but thank you so much.

Speaker 1 [00:52:17]: Next episode's theme is 'Europe's Pandemic Recovery and the Role of Education'. Our guests are MEP Henna Virkkunen, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Member of the the City Council at Rovaniemi Mikkel Näckeljärvi, and a Member of the Board at SAMOK, Alex Palm. This has been podcast 'Fascinating EU', funded by Europe Information at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Thank you for listening! Bye!

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