

Explanatory Note on the Pilot Project "Towards the Establishment of a European Diplomatic Academy"

Pilot projects introduce new initiatives that could become permanent EU funding programmes. A Pilot Project is an experimental initiative designed to test the feasibility of an action and its usefulness, and has a maximum duration of two years.

The pilot project modality allows MEPs to make suggestions/proposals for using a certain percentage of the annual EU budget for a series of projects that are of interest to the EU and its citizens.

The project "Towards the creation of a European Diplomatic Academy", authored by Nacho Sánchez Amor, was submitted through AET Committee in April 2021, which forwarded it to the EC for assessment, in what is the first phase (see below for a detailed explanation of the whole procedure).

Sánchez Amor's original proposal has as its main objective to investigate and analyse the possibilities of the creation, within the current framework, of a European Diplomatic Academy where the EU could carry out the main training and selection process for entry to the EEAS and EU Delegations. For the EU to move towards maturity in its External Action, it needs to develop a Diplomatic Academy of its own, where EU diplomats are prepared and converge on common EU values and interests. **The creation of a European Diplomatic Academy has been a longstanding call from the EP since around 2002.**

The EC confirmed at the end of July 2021 that this pilot project, after undergoing certain modifications in the evaluation phase, could receive the category A for pilot projects (this being the highest grade in the evaluation). The above-mentioned modifications were relevant to ensure a better evaluation of the project by the EC. The project is an ambitious proposal, and has had to face a demanding process in order to be implemented by the EC in the 2022 budget.

Pilot Projects Process (which includes the Pilot Project "Towards the creation of a European Diplomatic College"):

Among the requirements for pilot projects, in order to be considered by the EC, are the following: the EU must have competence; it contains no earmarking (it does not name any specific beneficiary); it fully complies with the Financial Regulation / EU legislation; there is no other legal basis under which the proposal could possibly be implemented; it introduces a complete idea; it does not limit the geographical scope.

This is a demanding process. The EC follows a "less quantity, more quality" approach. This means that in 2020, 353 projects were submitted to the pre-assessment phase, of which 142 reached the budget amendment phase, where 59 were finally approved (including the extension for a 2nd year of existing projects). Only 7% of the projects submitted were classified as A, while 10% as B, 69% as C, and 14% as D.

The stages are as follows:

- Selection in the respective EP Committee: In the first instance, pilot projects are submitted through the respective EP Committee according to the nature of the project in question. Nacho Sánchez Amor's project, due to its circumscribed nature in the external dimension of

the EU, was presented within the AFET Committee, where a maximum of 2 pilot projects are selected for each political group. This implies that each political group makes a selection of all the pilot projects presented by their respective MEPs up to a maximum of 2 per group. They are then formally submitted to the EC during the month of April.

- Pre-evaluation phase by the EC: it reviews all Pilot Projects that have been submitted by all MEPs (sent through EP committees), to assess the feasibility of the proposed actions and their compliance with the EU financial regulation. Projects are classified A-D according to their feasibility. Thus, A would be a project that achieves the highest possible grade and could be implemented as proposed; B could be implemented if slightly modified; C would exceptionally be implemented if substantially changed; and D could not be developed, or has already been implemented in the past.
- During late June/early July, the EC sends its assessment and gives a ranking between A and D, opening the second phase of re-evaluation, which allows for the possibility of modifying the submitted projects. This phase may last until the end of August.
 - In the case of the Pilot Project on the Diplomatic Academy, it was necessary to introduce certain modifications to the initial proposal so that it could aspire to obtain the maximum grade (A). Nacho sent his pilot project again (this time with some modifications) for a re-evaluation in mid-July 2021. The response from the EEAS (in charge of assessing the project) arrived a few days later and the EC's response at the end of July confirmed that the project was in category A.
- The last phase begins around September, and involves the submission of the projects as budgetary amendments to the annual EU budget by the EP. This process of budget preparation and negotiation between EP and CSL takes several months, almost until the end of the year.
 - First, the EP's political groups must agree on a final package of Parliament's own amendments from the total number of drafts submitted as amendments, which is sent to the EC. The EC, around mid-October, issues a "Letter of Enforceability", with the projects it considers the most appropriate to carry out. It is then that the Parliament, with this list of projects as amendments, and the CSL, negotiate the EU budget for 2022, which is approved in November/December. A Pilot Project presented as an amendment in the final text to be adopted is officially approved for 2022.
 - In mid-November 2021, the CSL and the EP finalise negotiations and reach an agreement on the EU 2022 annual budget. On 23 November the CSL adopts its final position. On 24 November, the EP votes in plenary. The 2022 budget is thus approved, as well as the pilot project on the Diplomatic Academy, opening the phase of its implementation by the EEAS since January 2022.
 - Throughout the process in the EP, the political support of the different political groups was evident in the approval of this pilot project in AFET, BUDG and later in the plenary (in the initial approval of the EP for the negotiations with the CSL and in the final approval after these negotiations). The only modification it had was in budgetary terms (a small cut of 9,500 euros), which affected the different pilot projects approved for the 2022 budget, with the aim of better fitting them into the corresponding budget line.

Nacho, as the driving force behind this project, has held several meetings with stakeholders. In this framework, Nacho was invited to the College of Europe by its rector, Federica Mogherini, where he had the opportunity to visit its facilities on 8 November 2021. Likewise, he was also invited to the premises of the European University Institute and the School of Transnational

Governance in Florence on 26 November 2021, as well as at the Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht, the Netherlands on 9 December 2021.

Latest developments: The EEAS has been responsible for the implementation of the pilot project on the European Diplomatic Academy from 2022.

As the promoter of this project, Nacho has held several meetings with interested parties. In this context, the Rector of the College of Europe, Federica Mogherini, invited Nacho to its premises where he had the opportunity to visit on 8 November 2021. He has been invited to visit also the facilities of the European University Institute and the School of Transnational Governance in Florence (IT) on 26 November 2021, as well as the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht (NL).

The EEAS studied the best ways to start its implementation: both the study of the actual creation of the European Diplomatic Academy, which had to take into account several factors (legal, institutional, human and financial resources, among others), and the implementation of the pilot tests included in Nacho's proposal.

On 12 November 2021, the EEAS published two public tenders for the implementation of the pilot project. One tender was for a feasibility study, and the other for the implementation of a pilot project in which a group of junior diplomats would be trained for a few months. The result of the publication of the above-mentioned EEAS tenders was announced by the EEAS on Wednesday 8 June 2022. From the competitive list of interested parties that applied, the feasibility study was awarded to the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) - together with the EUI-STG and CEPS-. The pilot test was granted to the College of Europe, which would carry out the training of a number of junior diplomats from Member States and candidate countries over a period of 9 months.

It should be noted that although this project was approved for the 2022 budget, it was necessary for Nacho to reintroduce it as an amendment to the 2023 EU Annual budget, in order to give it continuity, to exhaust the two-year life cycle of the pilot projects, and for it to be fully implemented. In this sense, and following the process of the pilot projects, on 23 March 2022, Nacho sent his proposal for extension to the EEAS so that it could be evaluated by the service. In his proposal, he requested the extension of the pilot project for another year and addresses the "target groups" that the European Diplomatic Academy would have, including those interested in becoming EU diplomats who are not currently MS' diplomats. The EEAS' assessment of this extension proposal received the highest grade (A).

Once the EEAS evaluation was received, Nacho introduced the proposal to extend this pilot project as an amendment to the AFET Committee's opinion on the 2023 EU Annual Budget Report. This amendment was approved by the AFET on 1 September 2022.

The legislative procedure for the extension is the same as described for the original proposal. The amendment approved in the AFET opinion on the EU Annual Budget Report 2023 was then approved in the BUDG Committee of the EP, which is responsible for the EU Annual Budget Report. It was then sent to the plenary session of the EP for vote. Immediately afterwards, the EP and the Council entered into negotiations (*trilogues*) and adopted a final text on the EU budget for 2023 (including the proposal to extend the Nacho pilot project). Once the negotiations were completed, the report was put to a vote and final approval by the Parliament (November 2023).

For the implementation of the extension of the pilot project, on one side, the EEAS foresaw to implement it in two different periods of 5 months each, where there Member States can send up to two participants either to the first period or to the second. This would be, for the moment, the only change with regard to the first edition. On the other side, there is a second study in its way addressing particularly the target groups for the Academy (who should have as students).

It should be added that in March 2023 Nacho proposed a new pilot project, but this time to DG NEAR (Commission), for the creation of a permanent academic programme for junior diplomats from candidate and potential candidate countries, inspired by the development of the European Diplomatic Academy project. DG NEAR was very interested in the proposal and it will implement it; however, its implementation will be outside the framework of the pilot projects.