



Europe, a land open to talent from elsewhere

Marjane Satrapi (1), a Franco-Iranian painter, comics author, director of several movies, “died of sadness” on Thursday, June 4, 2026 after losing her husband, Mattias Ripa, in 2025. They had met in Paris when they were both foreign students (2). She came from Iran, he has just arrived from Sweden. Several times awarded at the Angoulême Festival (dedicated to comics), author of the graphic novel *Persepolis* (L'Association, 2000-2003), Marjane Satrapi has adapted her bestseller into an animated film together with Vincent Paronnaud. Their film was awarded by the Prix du Festival de Cannes in 2007, then at the 2008 Caesars Awards. Her latest creation is a tribute to her long artistic journey together with her husband, the *Foundation Mattias and Marjane Ripa-Satrapi* (3). Member of the film and audiovisual section of the French Academy of Fine Arts, Marjane Satrapi’s foundation supports "foreign students in their project to come study cinema in Paris." In partnership with institutions of the film sector, its mission is to grant scholarships each year to two foreign students in their academic year to "promote artistic and educational innovation, and to raise awareness and train the youngest in artistic creation."

During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, a couple of German doctors with Turkish origin, Ugur Sahin and Ozlem Türeci, revolutionized vaccines and found a pioneering and revolutionary antidote (using messenger RNA). Ozlem Türeci’s father, a doctor from Istanbul, had settled in Lower Saxony (Germany) where she was born. Ugur Sahin arrived in Cologne at the age of 4 with his parents who came to work in a Ford factory. The couple met at a university in Saarland and set up their first company in 2001, which was successful enough to be acquired by a Japanese laboratory. They then founded another firm, BioNtech in 2008, which, in addition to a vaccine against COVID-19, works on individual therapies for cancer patients. The start-up has become a company of 1,800 people present in Germany and Cambridge (Massachusetts, USA), the place to be for health industry. In January 2020, as soon as the COVID genome was sequenced, the research couple found the antidote with a team of 40 people they had gathered. Another encounter was decisive, that between Ugur Sahin and Albert Bourla, CEO of Pfizer, himself an immigrant with Greek origins, a crucial common point in their positive relationship. BioNTech has become a biotechnology group in Mainz (Rhineland-Palatinate), valued at 21.5 billion euros on the stock market in May 2026. Its founders, still shareholders, preferred to leave a group subject to an industrial logic to devote themselves to their research and create a new start-up (5). Their main purpose is to develop scientific research.

Each member country of the EU-27 could publish a long collection of such success stories, with protagonists who are real “role models” for all young Europeans, whether or not they have families with migratory backgrounds. These collections must be constantly updated with new profiles, more anchored in the current events of this beginning of the 21st century. The beautiful paths are numerous and varied in Europe. They do not come only from dazzling success from rare rappers or high-level athletes, examples that are often inaccessible with many called upon and few chosen ones. Professional achievements, like entrepreneurs, come from all paths of life. They are often linked to an educational path of excellence, but not always, especially in artistic fields or in new sectors where training does not yet exist, everything is to be done. There are still "terra incognita", new areas to be discovered. Artificial intelligence or cryptocurrencies are such examples of economic sectors where everything is still to be built.

In times of extreme competition at the international level, where the European Union is challenged from all sides, it has strong arguments. It can rely first and foremost on its national talents. Educational excellence is one of the pillars of the European construction, with the Erasmus + program that enhances sharing "examples of good practices". But faced with a declining population and young people who have become a minority, the European Union must open its doors widely to the outside world. Foreign students are subject to a fierce and strategic competition. According to the latest data on international student mobility, collected by UNESCO, the OECD and Eurostat (6), it grew at a rapid rate of 27% between 2017 and 2022, reaching a total of 6.9 million students in 2022. International mobility leading to a diploma represents 2.7% of the total number of students worldwide. If the share is still a minority, it is experiencing strong growth. Between 2017 and 2022, the number of students on graduate mobility grew nearly twice as fast as the number of students worldwide (+27% and +15%, respectively).

Europe is the main receiving area, with nearly half of them (48%) with a notable increase of 9% in one year. Since 2017, the number of mobile students in Europe has increased by 43%, an increase led by Turkey, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Students are equally divided between EU (49%) and non-EU countries (51%). For the attractiveness of international students, political will makes a difference with very active countries such as the United Kingdom with its 2nd place ("Commonwealth" effect and prestigious universities like Oxford, Cambridge...). Germany is in 3rd place (European economic leader with reputable universities linked to the country's most industrious cities, Munich, Hamburg...). Canada is the third most active country (close to the United States and a land of emigration from time immemorial). Over five years, these countries experienced increases in their student population of respectively +55%, +56% and +60%. Other countries such as the United States (still leading but whose migration policy has discouraged) are declining (-15%) or stagnating like Australia (+0%) in 4th place. France is ranked 7th in the world (with an increase of 21%) a less progress than its German or British neighbors but it can count on the countries of the Francophonie.

To invest in a country, companies take into account many objective indicators - a solid internal market (consumers with purchasing power), attractive fiscal policies or public support from which they could benefit, political and social stability, an economic dynamism... Symbolic capital, in addition to capital (financial investments), human capital (skilled labor) and social capital (networks to mobilize) is decisive. The positive image that a country or territory conveys is composite – the respect for diversity and openness to the outside world (EU's DNA), the State of law (in case of trade disputes, principle of accession to the EU), the openness to foreign students or examples of professional achievements from personalities from abroad... Talented personalities like Marjane Satrapi or Ugur Sahin and Ozlem Türeci can make a difference in a decision where there is always an element of irrationality.

The future is a "*terra incognita*", it's better to open up to all opportunities and personalities, coming from Europe and worldwide. Today is building the talents of tomorrow- with our national students and those from around the world (Asia and Oceania, Americas, Africa). Europe is a territory open to all continents and to all talents, rich of its diversity.

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- (2) Roxana Azimi, Jacques Mandelbaum et Frédéric Potet « « La mort de Marjane Satrapi, autrice de « Persepolis », jalon de l’histoire de la bande dessinée », Le Monde, jeudi 4 juin 2026-
- (3) Fondation Mattias et Marjane Ripa-Satrapi -
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- (4) France Inter- 18 novembre 2020-
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