

Mugla Sıtkı Koçman University (MSKU)

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT* (Strategy for 2021-2027)

What is expected to be achieved by participating in the Erasmus+ Programme and how does the participation in the Programme fit into the institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

Worldwide, the majority of educational institutions place a higher importance to internationalization and increasingly adopt strategies of internationalisation to gain competitive advantage in both national and international markets, with Europe topping the list in this regard. In many countries, internationalisation is no longer regarded as a goal in itself but as a means to improve the quality of education as well as to sustain science through dynamic academic exchanges and building social and economic capacity.

Mugla Sıtkı Koçman University (MSKU) believes that internationalisation and modernization hold many positives for higher education including improved academic quality, internationally oriented students and staff, consciousness of national and international citizenship for students and staff, revenue generation, gaining new scientific perspectives and knowledge revealing potentials and strengths through collaborations, diversifying the learning environment for the benefit of students, the University and the nation. In the presence of above facts, MSKU can certainly not afford otherwise but solidly recognizes the importance of being part of a global network.

MSKU devotes special attention to international activities and has strong policies to support international involvement using various ways to strengthen its international relations. In this sense, with the aim of international competition and visibility, internationalisation of the University is regarded as a whole; curriculums, courses, students and staff with international and multicultural abilities, projects and research. In fact, internationalisation and modernization constitute an inherent part of the Institutional Strategic Development Plan. To bring the mentioned benefits and achieve the goals, MSKU focuses on the following strategies, approved by the University Senate on its Internationalization Policy Statement:

- Stimulating and strongly supporting academic mobility of students and staff to increase international awareness and competencies
- Facilitating the international involvement and networking of teaching and research staff
- Updating and modernizing the curriculum in order to meet international academic standards in line with global needs and changes
- Supporting activities and initiatives that help towards the increase of strategic partnership projects, through project coordination and support departments
- Developing new cooperation partnerships and strengthening already existing ones with universities abroad and increasing the number of inter-institutional agreements to actively facilitate mobility and exchange of knowledge

- Taking measures to increase the foreign language skills and abilities of the university students and staff as one of the important indicators of an international campus and absolute commodity for productive academic mobility
- Developing rational, applicable and sustainable policies to increase the number of full-time international students, paying attention to regional diversity and student quality
- Increasing the number of courses and degree programmes taught in foreign languages to support international visibility and quantity and quality of incoming mobility
- Planning social and cultural activities for the civic engagement and local orientation of international students
- Establishing a corporate culture in the University that is respectful to individual differences, tolerant and believer of European and world identity.
- Encouraging academic staff to help develop joint degree programmes

Over the years, with the indispensable benefits of Socrates, LLP and Erasmus+ Programmes, internationalisation strategies as outlined above, has become more and more achievable goals for our university. Being part of such networks, cooperation projects and persistent mobility activities has empowered our students and scholars for academic success creating an intercultural awareness and set out different dimensions and perspectives for our university. We have been able to sustain some contributory roles in research and education by maintaining quality partnerships and participating in several projects. The new Erasmus Programme, coming with some evolutionary new aspects, rather than complete and overall changes, will of course continue to present great advantages as being the most commonly recognized, most convenient and externally funded international programme for mobility, partnership, cooperation and policy and project development.

With the new Erasmus Programme, MSKU will find further and wider opportunities to increase the international mobility numbers of students and staff, based on the expectations of considerable rising in the programme budget. We expect to contribute to students' academic and professional progress, help raise them as non-discriminating, respectful individuals and have better chances of future high skilled employability, which will not only benefit them but also our country and Europe eventually.

As part of its internationalisation strategy, MSKU will continue, via new Erasmus Programme, to participate in international cooperation projects for expected contributions such as staying in various networks of European universities, creating strong partnerships, sharing global skills and expertise, and advancement in research and innovation.

In this competitive world, MSKU ought to enhance itself to be one of the effective and efficient higher education intuitions. Erasmus Programme, being one of the vital means of modernization through internationalisation for our university, is expected to provide a crucial part to this enhancement.

Through regularly and persistently taking part in the projects and actions implemented under the more strengthened Erasmus Programme, MSKU hopes to contribute to and benefit from the vision of EU aiming to deliver a modern and competitive European Education Area with the help of youth, education and culture policies containing such initiatives as spending time and studying abroad becoming a norm, recognition of qualifications across Europe, knowing more foreign languages, equal access to higher quality education and having a strong sense of European identity.

What is the considered policy for the practical implementation of the Erasmus+ actions intended for participation and how the institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of the institutional strategy?

Directly related to its strategy of being an internationally recognised university as a final goal, MSKU aims to train individuals with international skills and high competitiveness in all fields of education, be it business, art, technology or science, and to increase international awareness of its students and staff. Expanding the opportunities for the involvement of its students and staff in mobility is considered as a crucial tool in this direction. MSKU lays great stress on supporting student and staff mobility, trying to involve the widest possible range, mainly based on educational or research related mobility activities under Erasmus Programme. In fact, this appears as one of the main priorities underlined on the Internationalization Policy Document mentioned before. Perfectly serving for this aim, MSKU has taken part in Erasmus mobility activities through each project period and every year. Many mobility projects have been managed and completed successfully including all types of mobility. It is considered only natural and of course essential to continue our involvement in the "Mobility of Higher Education Students and Staff" through Key Action 1 (KA1) projects under the new Erasmus Programme in order to sustain this ongoing success. All mobility related projects and activities are and will be centrally implemented, managed and coordinated by the Erasmus Programme Office with the support of the Rectorate, relevant administrative offices, faculties and most importantly departmental academic coordinators.

Involvement in Strategic Partnerships is also one of the priorities of MSKU in order to strengthen the cooperation between universities, research centres, and industry/business world at both national and international level. Since the start of Turkey's participation in EU Programmes with Socrates, MSKU has been involved either as a partner or as a coordinator in many research, innovation, strategic partnership projects, benefited highly from all completed projects and is continuing to successfully conduct quite a few current projects. In fact, during Erasmus+ Programme between 2014-2020, there have been increasing tendency and attempts to develop, apply for or join Key Action 2 (KA2) projects, quite a few of which ended successfully. In the light of this fact and in line with the strong belief and support of our last appointed Rector and his management team for the absolute positive contribution to the University of these kind of projects, Project Coordination Centre under Technology Transfer Office was established not long ago, new initiatives and support programmes have been developed, role and resources of Academic Research Projects Unit has been strengthened immensely. These departments and units will be responsible supporting the promotion, development, implementation, administration and dissemination of such projects, working in coordination with faculties and academics. MSKU acknowledges the significance of "Partnerships for Cooperation and Exchanges of Practices" projects under Erasmus KA2 Action and will continue its support towards the increased involvement in all possible cooperation and partnership opportunities.

In regards to "European Universities" initiative, MSKU recognizes that international competitiveness in European Higher Education will increase in the near future and that many jobs will require high-level qualifications for the graduates. To be able to survive in a such competitive arena and provide such training for the young according to the needs of this future environment, that is to equip them with sufficient cognitive, professional, intercultural, social and networking skills, our university would like to search for the opportunities to take part in this initiative which may require deep technological and structural changes that will directly affect the teaching and learning environment.

Beyond its role in teaching, research and innovation, MSKU also wishes to address societal challenges and promote civic engagement and therefore believes in the benefit of training young people as whole individuals to face such challenges and able to find solutions to real life issues, as also advised by the European Commission. Searching for ways and ripening the conditions to have any kind of participation under the "Partnership for Excellence-European Universities" action, will not only equip us better towards this aim but also elevate our university to new horizons, linking us to strong and lasting institutions in Europe, benefiting from much deeper level of cooperation and being a part of European Education Area. Erasmus Programme Office will promote the initiative and be responsible for the overall coordination if any involvement is finally achieved.

MSKU has continuing negotiations with some of its partners and trying to establish initial grounds to collaborate with them towards the development of joint master degrees, in order to offer its students, the opportunity to pursue an integrated curriculum and become internationally engaged during their studies. Towards the achievement of yet another goal in this respect, MSKU believes in the necessity of requiring the accreditation to participate in "Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees" as one of the Erasmus KA2 activities. Erasmus Programme Office will promote the opportunities offered by the activity and provide relevant support to the students and staff interested in participating.

Relevant with its international strategy, MSKU wishes to increase the visibility and accessibility and be able to pose itself, as a preferred institution in the international arena and therefore all modernization instruments to achieve this are valued. In this regard, participating in "Partnerships for Innovation" activity under Erasmus KA2 and "Support to Policy Development and Cooperation" activity under Erasmus KA3 can help MSKU develop and follow more modern approaches towards the better governance of the institution, prepare and follow innovative policies, excavate alternative funding resources, develop better curriculums, improve teaching and research methods, serve towards the needs of society and industries for sustainable growth from local to global extent.

What is the envisaged impact of the participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on the institution?

It is underlined with the renewed Modernization of Higher Education Agenda published by the European Commission that innovative teaching and learning approaches as well as sustainable quality and efficiency of education and training have become very important for developing students' competitiveness in parallel with the updated skills needed in the labour market. Also with the need of adaptation to the requisites of this advanced and digitalised era, higher education institutions have to tailor their education systems through more achievable internationalisation and modernisation strategies. For successful integration into such developments, MSKU has placed focus on improving the existing international perspective. In this direction, participating actively in the actions of the Erasmus Programme has already and will continue to have essential positive impacts. Improved quality and efficiency in education and training, creation of the corporate culture for sustainable quality assurance, increased transparency in all education activities, improvement of learning outputs, adaptation to information society and European Education Area, rooting tolerance and intercultural dialogue within the institution, and contribution to research and scientific development are some of the envisaged impacts.

Participation in Erasmus activities will also enable us to increase the attractiveness of our study programmes and the demand for more international mobility through which international visibility will be achieved more easily. Besides, beneficial experiences gained via programme activities will drive our university to make further policy reforms and gradually decrease the barriers in front of collaboration and exchange of knowledge. Another expected impact would be the integration into common values and inclusive education declared by the Commission as the priorities of European Education Area. Through possible involvement in European Universities initiative, MSKU may give its students a chance to benefit in equity from quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning that generates the required skills for better adaptation into society.

As one of the quantitative targets, increasing the number of mobile outgoing students by 5% every year provided there is sufficient Erasmus funding acquired, is planned. Increased ratio of the academic departments meeting the Bologna criteria, renewal of all existing inter-institutional agreements for the new period and signed new ones, increased number of departments/degree programmes benefiting from at least one inter-institutional agreement enabling mobility, increased number of degree programmes delivering education in English and number of courses taught in English within the curriculum, risen percentage of outgoing students who have the desired foreign language level and skills, more short term international visitors and foreign academics hosted can be pronounced among other indicators that will allow us to evaluate our progress in achieving the desired impact.

MSKU will assess the quality of the project implementation through such indicators as providing thorough and constant information on mobility opportunities to potential candidates, ensuring the implementation of equal and inclusive as well as neatly documented application procedures, ensuring transparent and unbiased selection based on set regulations, setting fair and supportive administrative procedures before, during and after mobility, correct and just grant allocation, enabling efficient and correct use of learning agreements and ensuring full and automatic academic recognition after mobility. All procedures will be followed based on documented duty allocations among staff, work flow charts and timetables.

MSKU will make sure that constant, equal and inclusive support and monitoring for all participants, incoming and outgoing alike, is in place through the direct management of Erasmus Programme Office in coordination with the faculties, relevant administrative offices and academic coordinators. Orientation meetings and activities, continuous updates, individual consultancy via e-mail or direct contact, task related support and intercultural and linguistic support would be the qualitative indicators in this regard. With the start of the new Erasmus period, students will be informed about and encouraged to use the Erasmus Mobile Application for better and efficient support. Erasmus Programme Office will try to incorporate various other units and stakeholders into the process and exchange ideas to minimise the problems that participants might encounter.

As another important indicator of implementation quality and to enhance the desired impact, MSKU declares to follow, the agenda related to Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) implementations announced by the Commission. If we are not successful in receiving an upgraded version from the supplier of our existing commercial mobility management system, we will search for other ways to connect, with the help of the IT department, directly to the EWP Network, in line with the recommendations. MSKU will make use of the online Inter-Institutional Agreement Manager tool and start very soon renewing the agreements in preparation for the next Programme. As it will be mandatory to use the

online systems, enabling Erasmus to go digital, transition process will be completed systematically within few years starting with the new programme period in 2021, firstly for inter-institutional agreements and online learning agreements.

MSKU will try to make sustainability and long-term impacts possible through sharing the project results via various information channels, through producing materials, books, brochures and through cooperating with various stakeholders outside the University for achieving the utmost contribution at local, national and international level. On the other hand, applying new teaching/training methods acquired through projects, bringing new expertise and scientific improvement ideas via projects will have consistent impact on the infrastructure of our university for the long term. Intellectual property rights, such as patents and trademarks may be further long-term impacts that could allow us to continue productivity even after the completion of projects. Furthermore, contribution to Turkey's integration to EU, increased multi-dimensional quality in educational activities, economic and cultural livelihood brought to the city and the region, continuity of an intercultural environment and achieved sense of European identity will be the larger sustainable impacts of the Erasmus Programme.

In the widest scale, through participating in various actions, projects and initiatives under the Erasmus Programme, if MSKU can have the slightest contribution to this immensely positive picture for Europe and the world, some of the global responsibilities will have been achieved.

** As stated in the application for Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027, following which Mugla Sıtkı Koçman University was awarded the ECHE by the European Commission for Erasmus+ activities between 2021-2027.*