

# Origins of Erasmus, Development of Erasmus+ and the Future

Presentation by Dr Hywel Ceri Jones CMG to mark the 35th anniversary of the official launch of the Erasmus programme<sup>1</sup>

*Thank you warmly for your invitation as an original founder to participate in this special celebration of the 35th anniversary of the official launch of the Erasmus programme. I look back with pride on the two political breakthroughs we secured in the early days, first in 1976 to launch the EU's very first Action Programme in educational cooperation, and then in 1987 with the official launch of Erasmus itself. From the outset, it was clear that Erasmus responded to a long-term need in the EU. Our hopes were that it would prove to be a long-lasting programme. And our dream is being realised. It is a thrill for me to see Erasmus so widely acclaimed by citizens and young people across the continent.*

Hywel  
Ceri Jones

The word "education" did not feature as such in the original Founding Treaty of Rome. Despite several unsuccessful attempts in the 1960s, education had been taboo on the European political agenda. France, most especially, was at that time concerned that action in education might impinge on its concept of national sovereignty, arguing that cooperation should be restricted to an inter-governmental approach which would exclude the European institutions from playing a catalytic and organising role. Germany too was especially sensitive about the implications for its federal system in

which education was a devolved Länder responsibility.

It is difficult now in 2022 to realise that in the early 1970s, 0.5% only of the then EEC student population came from another Member State. Other than the foreign language teaching assistantship scheme which operated only between France, Germany and UK on a bi-lateral basis,<sup>2</sup> there was very little interchange for part-course study abroad involving other European countries, and certainly not involving areas of the curriculum other than foreign language teaching.

By 2022, 13 million in all – students, apprentices, young people, volunteers and staff – will have participated in Erasmus+. It now involves 27 Member states (following the regrettable exit of the UK) and 6 non-EU associated countries with 55 National Agencies responsible for the decentralised management of the programme.

It has engaged virtually all European Higher Education and, through its Erasmus Mundus dimension, connects universities across the globe. Its quality Erasmus brand is widely recognised throughout the world. "Doing an Erasmus" has become a tried and trusted way for students to enhance their knowledge and skills, thereby significantly improving their employability and career prospects.<sup>3</sup>

What a different picture we can see after 40 years of European collaboration, especially as a result of the EU's continuing commitment to its ambition to strengthen progressively the foundation and scope of Erasmus+. Stories abound from successive Erasmus generations<sup>4</sup> of alumni all over the world to confirm the extent to which their Erasmus experience provided a transformative, life enhancing dimension to them and for their careers.<sup>5</sup> The recent October 2022 anniversary celebration held in Brussels highlighted the experiences of the 35 participating young people. They provided inspiring examples of the impact on their mindsets and self-confidence as well as on their CVs and career opportunities. The Erasmus experience has brought educational, social, cultural and economic benefits to campuses and institutions across the globe and resulted in generating networks of new friendships between staffs and students, often also serving as a

source of "soft power" and "diplomatic value" to the countries involved. Erasmus has had a significant transformative influence too on the Europeanisation of campuses.

One happy unintended consequence of the programme is that there are now more than 1 million Erasmus babies in the world! A brilliant legacy from the exciting European adventures the programme has provided!

## Early History

Let me briefly trace the early history and the difficult political journey to secure the adoption of the Erasmus programme. The Paris European Summit held in November 1972 had marked a decisive shift of political attitude by the founding six Member States towards the future development of the then European Economic Community (EEC) to emphasise "its human face". In the words of the Paris communiqué, they agreed "to pay attention to non-material values as befits the genius of Europe." The Paris Summit gave rise to the opening of European Environmental Policy, a new thrust in favour of cooperation with the third world, the launch of the first Social Action programme, and the creation of a European Regional Development Policy and Fund (ERDF).

This was the political context when, together with Ireland and Denmark, the UK entered the EEC in 1973, making then a total of 9 Member States, a third of the present membership following successive enlargements.

Inspired by the retiring Commissioner Altiero

1. An expanded version of the author's presentation at the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the official launch of the Erasmus programme held in Brussels by the European Commission on 20 September 2022, inspired by the exchanges between Commissioner Gabriel and Vice-President Schinas and 35 Erasmus+ alumni present from all over Europe on that occasion.

2. The bilateral scheme for the exchange of language assistants between the UK and France dates back to 1904, whilst Germany established its bilateral scheme with France and the UK a little later. Some spent their time in universities; others led English conversation classes as assistants in schools. These were valuable experiences in helping students to improve their foreign language skills, exposing them to other cultures. But they touched a tiny percentage of the student population.

3. Research indicates that mobile university students are twice as likely to have found a job one year after graduation compared to their non-mobile counterparts, one in three higher education trainees are offered a position in the company with which they trained abroad and one in 10 trainees go on to create their own company, 92% of European employers are looking for candidates with transversal skills when recruiting, and evidence shows that mobile students acquire these skills better having studied abroad.

4. Generazione Erasmus: L'Italia dalle nuove idee - A cura di Francesco Cappé - 2011 Franco Angeli, Milano

5. The Erasmus Phenomenon – Symbol of a new European generation? - Peter Lang edition, Frankfurt 2013

Anne Corbett: Universities and the Europe of Knowledge - Palgrave Macmillan 2005

Commission Européenne - Histoire de la coopération Européenne dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation

Muriel Bourdon Communautés Européennes - L'Europe des universitaires - Collection EUROPA - Presses universitaires de Grenoble, mars 2012

Spinelli, the incoming Commission decided in 1973 to establish a Department for Education and Youth Policy for the first time. Spinelli had the vision to argue that a strong educational and cultural dimension was necessary to build an open, democratic Europe, dedicated to promoting peace and reconciliation across the European continent. I was privileged to be appointed as its first Head with the challenge of preparing proposals for a European Action Programme.<sup>6</sup>

The crucial challenge then was to give Member States the political assurance that engaging in education at European level would not lead to harmonisation of the educational systems, and that the European Commission would not seek to impose binding legislation on the Member States, the method of operation which typified its approach in fields such as agricultural policy and the establishment of the Customs Union, requiring common European rules for their effective operation.

### The First Political Breakthrough in 1976

The charismatic engagement and internationally acclaimed academic credibility of Professor Ralf Dahrendorf<sup>7</sup> as European Commissioner was an important factor in preparing the ground towards the

first political breakthrough secured in the Commission's negotiations with European Ministers of Education. In February 1976 the Council and Ministers of Education agreed to the first programme establishing close cooperation between the educational systems in the EEC. Ministers then also agreed that the European Commission could act as the facilitator and broker of the 22-point action programme and that an Education Committee be set up consisting of the Member States and the European Commission to oversee the cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

The original concept of the Erasmus programme dates back directly to this first programme, when Ministers agreed "to promote joint courses of study between universities and higher education institutions". This was the seedling of what was to develop as the core idea of the Erasmus programme. I had proposed this formula to the Commission and to the Education Committee as a result of my previous experience when working at the University of Sussex, the first of 7 new universities set up in the UK in the 1960s following the recommendation of the Robbins report. The Sussex School of European Studies broke new ground in the UK by providing organised opportunities for all its students, whatever their major discipline – not only linguists – to pursue a year abroad as an integral and recognised part of their degree programme. I was



convinced that such an idea could be developed on a European-wide basis.

involving highly integrated approaches leading to the award of joint degrees.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the diversity of systems for academic recognition and student financing, it then took what turned into a 10-year development period from 1976-1986 to demonstrate that the scheme we designed could work well in practice. Furthermore, the pioneering experimentation initiated during this period with credit transfer and modular units of study (the ECTS) proved to be full of promise for larger scale development. The scheme received enthusiastic backing from universities and students across Europe. In all, almost 600 joint programmes between faculties were developed under the scheme, some of them

Two important political impulses contributed to creating a favourable context for formal presentation of the Erasmus initiative as such. Firstly, the People's Europe report submitted by the Adonnino Committee to the Milan European Council was well received by it in June 1985.<sup>10</sup> Adonnino called for a "comprehensive programme of EU inter-university exchanges and studies open to a significant section of the Community's student population". In approving the Adonnino report, the Milan Summit echoed the political commitment made earlier at the Hague Summit of 1969 to

6. Hywel Ceri Jones was appointed to head the first education and youth policy department of the European Commission set up in 1973, responsible for developing the first educational cooperation programme at European level launched in 1976. He was promoted to director for education and training in 1978 and then in the 1980s led the Commission team which initiated, negotiated and managed the different EU flagship programmes, including Erasmus, Comett, Eurotecnat, Lingua, Petra, Force and Youth for Europe.

7. Professor Ralf Dahrendorf was attributed the portfolio for Education, Science and Research in 1973. He was also responsible for the major breakthrough in the Council in negotiating the mutual recognition of qualifications for doctors.

8. This first education action programme was adopted on the basis of a mixed Resolution of the Council and Ministers meeting within the Council. This double formulation was negotiated as a special political formula to recognise a mixture of inter-governmental and communautaire competence. It was a unique formula adopted then in the conduct of the Council of Ministers.

9. In this initial period, it is interesting to note that the British Polytechnics especially played an important role in demonstrating the value of joint programming of studies and the mutual recognition of the period spent abroad. The three-way joint programme set up by Middlesex Polytechnic, the Ecolé Supérieure de Commerce at Reims and the Fachhochschule at Reutlingen in the Federal Republic of Germany was one of several inspiring examples at that time.

10. Histoire de la Cooopération Européenne dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation Comment l'Europe se construit – Un exemple Commission européenne 2006

This volume was edited by Luce Pepin, formerly Director of Eurydice. It provides an authoritative and official account of the history of European educational cooperation.

engage young people much more actively in building Europe and developing a mentality of cooperation.

The second crucial factor was the parallel decision of the EU Summit to set the political target of 1992 for completion of the European Internal Market. This gave added momentum to both the Erasmus and Comett (University/Industry Cooperation) initiatives, proposed by the Commission, attracting wide public and private sector support for their adoption as well as from universities and students. The idea of free circulation of students and researchers was increasingly linked to the central importance attached by the EU to the establishment of the internal market and its four principles of free movement of services, goods, capital and persons. It was argued that future professionals in all fields should be able to act as multipliers of further European cooperation, developing a new kind of professionalism which would know best how to exploit the opportunities of the European Single Market, gained through experience of working and studying in another country and by acquisition of at least one foreign language.

The thorny question of mutual recognition of both academic and professional qualifications had become a matter of growing policy concern,<sup>11</sup> especially important for young people and notably

for teachers and trainers. The rapidly increasing number of business mergers and joint ventures of all kinds emerging across the EU brought in their train new patterns of voluntary mobility, especially for the highly- skilled and qualified. Many firms gave a new European profile to their recruitment policies which in turn influenced the content of curricula at all levels, as education systems sought to provide for these new needs.

Many signals followed of young people wishing to make their careers and plan their education and training in a European context. This coincided with the growing Europe-wide concern and consistent backing of the European Parliament to invest in people, their skills, their creativity and versatility as powerful forces for economic development.

### Negotiation and Adoption of the Erasmus Proposal

During this period, the Gravier judgement in 1985 issued by the European Court of Justice had a profound influence on the legal debates on the place of education and training in the Treaty. A case had been brought by Françoise Gravier, a French national who wished to pursue a course in cartoon design at a Belgian art school in Liège. She took the Belgian authority to court on the grounds that, as an EC national,

she should have been given a place on the same terms as Belgian students and not charged the higher foreign student fee called the minerval. The European Court accepted that there should be no discrimination between EC (now EU) nationals in terms of access to training and that the word ‘training’ (case-law 294/83 Gravier (1985) ECR 593) should be deemed to cover university education.

Encouraged by the rulings of the European Court of Justice and by the enthusiastic reactions from the higher education world, the Commission seized the opportunity to propose the full Erasmus programme, building on its well tested foundations. The difficult experience encountered by the Commission in its successful negotiation with the Council of the Comett programme (university-industry collaboration) led it to argue that the legal basis for Erasmus should be justified by reference to both Article 235 (a catch-all article) and the vocational training Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome. On this combined legal basis, the Commission proposed to promote its objective “to secure a pool of manpower to provide a broader basis for intensified economic and social cooperation in the Community”.<sup>12</sup>

The negotiations which led to the adoption of both the Erasmus and Comett programmes

owed a great deal to the determination and dynamic leadership of Commissioners Peter Sutherland and Manuel Marin, both of whom were passionately attached to winning what turned into a difficult period of confrontation in negotiations of these proposals within the Council, notably with the three largest Member States which challenged the legality of the Treaty basis to approve and finance these programmes.<sup>13</sup>

With the explosion of enthusiastic support from universities and students and effective lobbying of Prime Ministers at the London European Summit, the programme was finally agreed and officially launched in 1987.<sup>14</sup> A crucial role was played by a group of European Rectors led by Rector Roger Dillemans following a seminar he hosted at Leuven University where the 30 rectors present agreed to directly lobby their respective Prime Ministers and Presidents in the European capitals prior to the forthcoming London European Summit. There is no doubt that the outstanding leadership qualities of Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, strongly supported by President Mitterrand in particular, <sup>15</sup>played a decisive role in finally persuading the reluctant Mrs Thatcher, thereby securing the political breakthrough at this tense Summit held in December 1986, much to the delight of

11. Qualifications were but the tip of the iceberg. Concern grew about the barriers to movement and the educational systems were being called upon to help remove stereotyped conceptions and prejudices about other countries and other peoples. Jack Smith, General Motors international boss, summed up the problem on a global scale in an apocryphal tale he told at a Stockholm motor show.

Students at an international school were studying the automobile business. The Americans wrote a paper on the world's biggest and best cars. The English concentrated on the motor and the glory of the British Empire. The French topic was love and the automobile and the Italians never quite agreed on what their subject should be. The Germans devoted 12 volumes to the theory of the automobile, and the Swedes did a thesis on how to make cars for joy and fulfilment. Finally, the Japanese students came up with a strategic plan for 100% market share.

12. Commission Européenne  
Histoire de la coopération Européenne dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation  
Communautés Européennes

13. Article published in December 2017 by Hywel Ceri Jones  
“Tribute to two Founding Fathers of the EU's Erasmus programme  
Published by the Federal Trust.

14. Council of the European Communities (1987)  
Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) (Doc 87/327/EEC)

Official Journal of the European Communities

15. President Mitterrand had addressed an audience of students in Paris on Europe as the way forward, committing fully to support the Erasmus programme.

universities and students across Europe. With its historic symbolism and immediate appeal, the official title Erasmus worked perfectly as an acronym – European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. As a result, the programme was to make a quantum leap at this point in the size of EU budget allocated to higher education cooperation and mobility and in the numbers involved, thanks again to the enthusiastic backing of the European Parliament.

### Key Architectural Features of Erasmus

The basic architecture of the Erasmus programme has remained fundamentally the same to this day in respect of its universities and higher education dimension, although the + in its present title now indicates the far greater breadth and depth of its coverage. Looking back, I recognise that the initial 10-year period of development and try-out through the Joint Study Programmes Scheme provided a necessary phase of experimentation and confidence building.

Whilst the organised mobility of students within Europe continues to be the idea that caught the wider popular imagination, the keys to its continuing long-term success lie in its basic architecture. It is often still incorrectly described as an exchange programme. This misses the central point of the programme's role in strengthening the long-term mission of universities by encouraging them to seek to embed a strategy of Europeanisation and internationalisation through organised partnership agreements in their teaching and study programmes.

Let me highlight three features which have contributed to the sustainable impact and quality of the Erasmus programme, in its original field of higher education.

Firstly, the decision to open Erasmus to students of all disciplines was perhaps the most significant innovation. Present and future labour market opportunities required graduates in all fields, not only law, economics and business studies, the capacity to work across the cultures through the medium of at least two and preferably three languages. Erasmus students have come from all disciplines, from humanities and the creative arts through business and law, social and natural sciences, mathematics and computing, engineering, manufacturing, agriculture and veterinary science to medicine and nursing. The idea of securing a jointly awarded qualification was seen to represent a huge plus on the student's CV for his or her future career. In some cases, more than 3 or 4 universities were involved in such multi-national collaborative ventures.

Secondly, the programme was conceived from the outset to promote initiatives on a voluntary and decentralised basis, not as a top-down scheme via national authorities. The power of initiative was placed firmly in the hands of universities themselves to seek and develop partnerships abroad. With their own degree-awarding powers in most European countries, universities were to be the initiators and drivers of the process. The institutional stamp of engagement of the university authorities was seen as the sine qua non for a lasting, long-term effort to embed the capacity to mount and approve such joint degrees or joint ventures.

University authorities were expected to give the assurance that the period of study spent abroad would be fully recognised as a necessary and integral part of the students' final qualification, and explicitly presented as such in the final degree or certificate awarded to students. This precondition became a key component of the Erasmus Charter which participating universities are required to sign when committing to participation in the programme.

The decentralised approach adopted by the Commission led many universities to set up their own Erasmus or European offices to assist in institutionalising their partnership agreements, committing themselves institutionally more than ever before to a process of internationalisation of their teaching and study programmes. This commitment provided crucial backup to the vital decision which we also negotiated to underpin the Erasmus programme by forging reciprocal cross-national arrangements regarding the financing of such interchange, including the waiving of tuition fees and the provision of Commission top-up grants to participating students towards their travel and subsistence which would complement the different national systems of student financing.

The third decision which has continued to make all the difference in the development of Erasmus was for the Commission to offer grants to academic and administrative staffs to help them to reconnoitre possible

partners abroad to plan jointly with their partners preparation of the necessary quality conditions governing the teaching and assessment of the (often truly joint) courses which Erasmus students would be studying. Over the years, this helped build up mutual trust and professional friendships, thereby enhancing mutual understanding of the different national systems and structures of curricula and degrees, as well as generating widespread confidence in the overall Erasmus scheme. Thousands of grants have been awarded for both teaching and staff training assignments – so crucial to changing the European educational landscape, and later seeding the Bologna process addressing the modernisation of the European Higher Education systems.<sup>16</sup>

We can now see that the Erasmus programme and its European credit transfer scheme (ECTS) have contributed in a significant way to this reform process in the EU higher education scene. Since 1987 the trio of programmes – Erasmus, Comett (University – Industry Collaboration) and Lingua placed inter-university and higher education cooperation in Europe on a much larger scale than any previous international venture.<sup>17</sup> Following the fall of the Berlin wall, this pattern of education cooperation was given further impetus by the dramatic pace of political changes in Central and Eastern Europe after years under the Communist yoke. This led to the EU decision to launch from 1990-1991 the Tempus scheme, modelled on

16. Erasmus+ 2017 - European Commission 2018

17. Article by Hywel Ceri Jones for Prospect June 1991

Promoting Higher Education's contribution to the developing European Community – the European Community Higher Education Programmes.

Erasmus and Comett, tailored to respond to the reform needs of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, helping them to adapt and open their higher education systems through cooperation with Western institutions.

Education and training moved up the European political agenda. Fuelled by the dynamic of the Erasmus and Comett programmes, mutual confidence grew between the different educational authorities. This certainly contributed to the successful negotiations leading to the introduction of a new chapter on education and vocational training policy in the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.<sup>18</sup> It provided a clear legal basis for the future and has made it possible subsequently for the EU budget to be drawn on to finance Erasmus and other education programmes. The wording of the two articles in the Treaty make it totally clear that the idea of harmonisation of the education and training systems is ruled out. The explicit formulation of the primary responsibility of Member States on education policy and the complementary role of the EU are perfect examples of subsidiarity written into the Treaty.

### Erasmus and its Global Dimension

The progressive expansion and appeal of Erasmus were given further momentum

when the Commission launched the Erasmus Mundus programme in 2004. Hundreds of Masters programmes have been supported as well as scholarships for thousands of students, involving over 80 countries from all over the world, including partners in India, China, Brazil, Russia and the USA. This world-wide scope of Erasmus was further enhanced by the success of the special effort opened by its International Credit Mobility Initiative involving non-EU partners around the world, funding short-term mobility of students, researchers and staff to and from Europe.<sup>19</sup>

This global outreach was further enhanced when the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe 2020 programmes were together adopted as centrepieces of the EU's strategy of development for 2016-2020. Together, they have enriched and strengthened the long-term missions and performance of universities and other higher education institutions throughout Europe.

### Broadening the Scope to Erasmus+

By including this strong impetus from Erasmus Mundus, since 2014, Erasmus+ was developed as a programmatic framework, building on its original inter-university base and drawing inspiration from the parallel EU initiatives in other fields of education and training.<sup>20</sup>

The + sign indicates that it now also provides Erasmus opportunities to those working and studying in the fields of initial and further vocational education, sectors previously underrepresented in international collaboration. This greater breadth of the programme fitted well into the EU-wide concern to raise the status and quality of vocational education and training throughout Europe as a vital component of the EU strategy to promote lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the + in the programme also signalled the popular opening of Erasmus cooperation to help efforts to build schools fit for the 21st century, intensify cooperation with European partners and to promote a sense of global citizenship for young people and in school curricula.

The field of adult education and important EU initiatives in the areas of Youth and Sport were further important additions at this point.

All these fields had previously been the focus of separate EU programmes, in some cases stretching back to the turn of the century or even before. Later, the opportunity was taken to include the European Solidarity corps (launched in December 2016) incorporating the successful European Youth Voluntary Service.<sup>21</sup>

### EU Programming 2021-2027

The unwise and unnecessary decision taken by then Prime Minister Boris Johnson to exit the UK from the Erasmus

programme coincided poignantly with release of the European Commission's exciting proposals for the next phase of EU development, particularly for the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes (the research framework programme re-titled) for the period 2021-2027.

In view of its great popularity and the appeal of its iconic world brand, the European Commission proposed doubling the Erasmus+ budget to 30 billion Euros for the period 2021-2027. This would make it possible to support at least 12 million persons and to extend targeted support to engage many more from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special needs.

At the same time, the European Commission also proposed the budget for Horizon Europe should be increased to 100 billion Euros, the highest absolute increase ever to this globally recognised EU research programme. Horizon Europe was designed to underpin the EU's collective effort to address global challenges with a clear focus on meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals through effective joint action. Over half the total budget would be devoted to tackling global challenges, with the target of 25% of this expenditure to support climate objectives and eco-innovation to support implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Furthermore, the Commission proposed that the special focus of Horizon Europe in respect of sustainable development and climate change be complemented by the new commitment of Erasmus+ to fund strategic and cross-disciplinary

18. Following the successful launch of these programmes, the Delors Commission decided to establish an independent Task Force for human resources, education, training and youth policy with Hywel Ceri Jones as its Director, reporting directly to Commissioner Vasso Papandreou. The Task Force successfully launched the TEMPUS scheme (see above) prepared the proposals which led to anchoring education in the Treaty and prefigured the creation of a dedicated Directorate General for Education. At that point, Hywel Ceri Jones was promoted to act as Director- General for employment, social policy and industrial relations in the Commission.

19. Erasmus+ Annual Report 2017 - European Commission 2018

20. Histoire de la Cooopération Européenne dans le domaine de l'éducation et la formation See other Community programmes which progressively had an impact on the design of Erasmus+ Communautés Européennes - Petra page 121 - Lingua page 122-3 Force and Eurotecte pages 124-5 - Tempus pages 125-128 - Youth Exchanges 129-130

21. Erasmus+ Annual Report 2017 - European Commission 2018

collaboration between universities on this theme.<sup>22</sup>

Setting this new level of ambition for Europe's global leadership in higher education development, science and innovation, with both Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe working in synergy, would scale up international academic cooperation on an unprecedented scale. Together they would also underpin the EU commitment in its strategy 2021/2027 to continue to promote active European citizenship and European common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. Complementarity on fundamental rights is key and has been strengthened in Horizon Europe following the agreement in the EU's Global Approach to Research and Innovation to require respect of academic freedom, gender equality, and respect for diversity and accessibility from international partner countries.

The substantial expansion of these EU engines of investment in research and education were to form central pillars of support for its reformed EU anti-austerity, pro-sustainability strategy for the future of Europe. To my mind, this strategic complementarity of Erasmus+ and the Horizon Europe programmes should continue to be further consolidated by the EU in its strategy of development, so crucial to realising Europe's innovative potential, and to driving our shared commitment to promote a creative, knowledge-based economy and inclusive society across Europe.

Sadly, continuing doubts remain at present about UK participation in the EU Horizon Europe programme. This is feared and regretted by former Nobel prize winners in the UK and by the research community. Following on the unnecessary exit from the Erasmus programme, its loss would signal yet another missed opportunity for the UK to contribute to the innovation effort on the global stage, especially the fight against climate change, and undoubtedly damage the status and reputation of the UK in this respect. The public mood in the UK remains perplexed on these issues as it still struggles to come to terms with the negative implications of its post-Brexit situation. Research partners across Europe regret this situation as they recognize that the UK had clearly increased the reach and impact of the Horizon Europe programme, often providing a leading and a coordinating partner in funded projects, and, in respect of the 2020 budget the UK had paid in 20% less than it had received in funding.

### Towards the Future

Evidence from Commission reports clearly confirm that Erasmus+ is going from strength to strength in this current programming period. We have much to celebrate on this anniversary and to look forward to the future with the Erasmus+ dynamic at the heart and soul of the Europe we need. The decision in 2021 through extra funding provided in the Erasmus+ budget to speed up the EU's collective capacity to master the green and digital transformations has sent out important signals to the European population as to these priorities. Furthermore, the European

Council's positive response to President Macron's ambitious proposals set out in his Sorbonne initiative<sup>23</sup> has begun to take shape through an ambitious extension of the Erasmus+ provision for universities and higher education through the creation of a significant number European alliances of universities to boost their excellence and enhance their contribution to meeting the global challenges we are facing in today and tomorrow's world.

The success over the years of universities and higher education institutions across Europe in forging joint degrees through partnership building is now given an extra dimension by the encouragement through Erasmus+ to create joint European degrees, with European labelling, and the initiation of the new European student card.<sup>24</sup> I very much hope that this initiative will also embrace the range of initial and further vocational education institutions and schools in this strategic effort, building on the positive experience of their engagement through Erasmus+ over the last decade. The wider objective of the programme to generate a sense of belonging to Europe will surely help, as President Macron put it, "to provide the cement needed to hold Europe together". Testimonies drawn from the experiences of former alumni should be continuously added to the Erasmus+ treasure-store in this perspective.

We all doubtless welcome the hugely significant EU funding provided from the EU budget to both the Erasmus+ and Horizon programmes as a clear indication of the EU's priority planning for the future. I would like to urge the Commission

to use this EU strategic funding to explore building complementary funding partnerships to multiply the impact of this investment through cooperation with the world of industry, commerce and finance, including venture capitalists, as well as with private foundations, enterprises and with regional and local authorities. Our objective should be to scale up their impact to guarantee maximum possible participation in both programmes, thereby continuing to make an even stronger strategic contribution to the European economy, labour markets and to the living and working standards of European citizens. The 2023 Year of European Skills soon to be celebrated will provide an ideal opportunity for the Commission to launch such an idea. This will not only help to ensure and strengthen the sustainability of European economies. It will also further boost the unique role played by Erasmus+ in bringing people together across national borders, thereby promoting the emergence of a truly European society.

### Concluding remarks

My former colleagues and I look back with pride on the triumph of the exceptional teamwork we enjoyed in the conception, negotiation and foundation of the Erasmus programme. I wish today to extend our warm congratulations to the previous and present Commission team which continues to drive the success of Erasmus+ with passion and commitment. It is great to see that the future of the EU's treasured "jewel" is in their capable and dedicated hands.

22. Article by Hywel Ceri Jones on Education & Research: The Future at risk. - Federal Trust and 'Click on Wales' websites 2018.

23. President Macrons new initiative for Europe was set out in his speech at the Sorbonne on 26/09/2017.  
24. European strategy for a European universities' initiative January 2022. See European Commission.