



the number of student and staff mobilities. In fact, we are in the first place by the success rate of applications. But, of course, we can achieve more," mentioned Karlova in her welcoming remarks.

Erasmus+ BOOST project coordinator Marianna Harutyunyan presented the achieved outcomes of the project: the benchmarking analysis conducted on internationalization practices; the development of a comprehensive national strategy



for internationalization and action plan; the development of the national model for study-abroad

programs; the establishment of international cooperation offices and service-oriented centers at Armenian HEIs, among others.



Tatevik Gharibyan, specialist on higher education policy development from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Republic of Armenia and Gayane Harutyunyan, director of the National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility, presented the internationalization strategy for Armenian HEIs. The conference participants had the opportunity to discuss the important role of the presented strategies and make their input. Also, members of the project partner institutions shared their lessons learned on best practices during recent training sessions and international weeks

organized by European partners of the consortium. The representatives from Instituto Superior Tecnico, University Rovira I Virgili, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and Tallinn University of Technology presented the experience of internationalization at their home institutions, development of the process, as well as the challenges and achievements.

During the dissemination conference, representatives of Erasmus+ capacity building projects in Armenia, HARMONY, MINERVA, and SMART led an inter-project discussion. The conference was followed by the consortium management team meeting the next day. The agenda included the remaining tasks to be completed in five months until the end of the project.



## PARTNERS' PARTICIPATION IN WORKSHOP IN STOCKHOLM

On March 9-13, 2020, BOOST consortium partners from Armenia, representing the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, Armenian State Pedagogical University, Shirak State University, Vanadzor State University, Yerevan State Conservatory, and National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility participated in the study tour

hosted by the Royal Institute of Technology, KTH. The study tour aimed at boosting awareness on research and innovation in higher education.



During the entire week, the participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with research in

Sweden: funding, environment, and political landscape; PhD education in Sweden and KTH; the research policy of KTH; trans-disciplinary research and innovation for sustainable energy systems; as well as scientific publishing at KTH. The energy platform is KTH's focal point of interaction on new ideas and projects in the energy domain. Senior and young researchers identify themselves as part of the KTH energy community. KTH energy researchers have access to advanced test beds, living labs, and demonstration facilities on campus and in the

facilities of KTH's strategic partners. KTH researchers capitalize on their partnerships, such as "STandUP" for Energy, KIC InnoEnergy, and KTH Strategic Partnerships.



The participating Armenian partners presented documents developed within the framework of the BOOST project, including procedures

on student and staff mobility, marketing strategies, statute of the Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility, and PR procedures. Some of these documents have already been approved by the scientific councils. On March 10, the consortium partners had a meeting in ENIC-NARIC, Swedish Council for Higher Education. During the visit, Gayane Harutyunyan, director of the National Information



Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility, gave a brief presentation on the education system in Armenia, as well as the main functions and structure of the Center. Also, Erik Johansson, credential evaluator in ENIC-NARIC, presented the education system in Sweden. Alongside the study tour, the Erasmus+ BOOST consortium management meeting addressed the project activities planned for the remaining months.

## ITALIAN STUDENTS' THOUGHTS ON VISITING ARMENIA

Three months ago we arrived in Armenia to study at the Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU) within the Erasmus+ Project. On the first day, we wondered "What made us do this?" From the second day on, we started thinking "We don't know exactly why we did it, but it was the right decision."



In the first couple of days, it was shocking for us to see how people reacted when we told them we

were Italians: they were very happy and started telling us a lot of things they know about Italy (musicians, filmmakers, singers, and so on). Yerevan is a beautiful city with many attractions, cafes, clubs, and nightlife. But it is also so diverse. You can stroll along Saryan Street with a lot of modern wine shops and then find yourself in one of the oldest districts in Yerevan — Kond. We liked Armenia not only for its places, but also for its people: they are hospitable and not so different



from Italians. They are also very helpful and with a great sense of cultural identity.

Another interesting aspect is that, in Armenia, we met people from different Middle Eastern countries, and it was interesting to learn different points of view on certain topics from non-European people,

like Syrian, Iranian, Georgian, Lebanese, and so on. Armenia is a country of extreme contrasts. It is a perfect combination of Europe, Asia, and the Caucasus. It is a cultural, architectural, and artistic treasure. Armenia is both the endless and noisy traffic of Yerevan and the serene silence of monasteries where time appears to have stopped. When we came to Armenia we didn't know almost anything about this country, just some history linked to the Armenian Genocide.



Three months later, we can say we'll go back to Italy with quite a deep knowledge about the identity of this small but great country, its people, its history, and its traditions.

**Melanie Palermo, Halima Fatimi, Aleksandra Patrycja**

University of Macerata, Italy

## VANADZOR STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AT ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAN

We are currently studying at Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM) in Poznan within the framework of Erasmus+ ICM program. The first two months spent in Poznan were full of mixed emotions and experiences. There were times when we were deeply frustrated and distressed because of the widespread fear of getting infected and the growing apprehension about losing the chance of completing the semester at UAM. The increasing uncertainty in our understanding of the degree of contagion of COVID-19 and the up-to-the-minute information about the dangerous and often deadly consequences caused by the virus worldwide amplified our hesitation to stay in Poland longer. Once or twice we even decided to go back to Armenia where, we thought, we would feel more secure and protected. Despite all our misgivings, after long and careful reasoning, we finally decided to stay and continue our semester in Poznan. The first reason for our choice was connected with our love for this fascinating and amazing city and the possibility of taking interesting courses at the host university. To our great surprise

and satisfaction, it didn't take us long to understand that even in such a high-pressure situation we still have an opportunity to enjoy our time in Poznan, and that these unfavorable conditions are not going to last forever. We gradually got accustomed to this situation and started to enjoy our time thinking more positively. During all this time, we have received great support from both our home and host universities, daily updates



about the recent developments and decisions relevant to our stay. The coordinators from both universities have been regularly in touch with us and interested in our wellbeing. From the very beginning of online learning, the UAM lecturers started to conduct the lessons remotely at a very professional level. We would never have thought that online

classes could be so effective and the interaction with lecturers and students so enjoyable. Due to the steadfast psychological support we have been getting from our families and friends, as well as the constant reassurance and encouragement we have been receiving from the faculty from both universities we have managed to overcome most, if not all, the difficulties we have encountered so far.

As regards our leisure activities, we are doing different things such as cooking tasty dishes, doing online shopping, or just walking. As we are now allowed to go out with masks on, we spend a lot of time outside visiting various picturesque parks. Hopefully, we will soon have a chance to visit some of the famous museums and art galleries in Poland. We also are keeping in touch with students from Poland and other countries chatting or cooking with them online.

To sum up, the lesson that we have learned from studying in Poland under these extreme conditions is the following: "There is nothing to complain about if you have the ability to be happy inside." We can say we'll go back to Italy with quite a deep knowledge about the identity of this small but great country, its people, its history, and its traditions.

**Lusine Manukyan,  
Anahit Grigoryan**

Vanadzor State University, Armenia

## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON STUDIES IN ARMENIA



*I chose AUA because I wanted to improve my English skills and having classes in English is a great way to do it. I really liked meeting people from different countries, discover different cultures. I loved Armenian food, also the countryside, and the people, of course. About AUA, I mostly liked the teachers' rapport with students and the interactive classes. I also loved the food in the cafeteria.*

**Matthieu Van Der Vleugel**  
University of Mons, Belgium



*I chose Armenia because it was the only country on the list that I had never heard of. I had a list of many countries like France, Spain, the U.S., Canada, ... and the last one was Armenia, and I decided to pick that one over the U.S. and Canada. I really liked the dynamic and enthusiastic approach of the study abroad staff. They are the best, and I think they beat all their colleagues in other universities. I liked the fact that the cost of living in Armenia is so affordable. People are nice and the weather is pretty good. AUA probably offered the best learning experience I had in university classes. I like the quality of education at AUA the most. Instructors are willing to listen to us, take into consideration our opinions, and teach us accordingly. Something not so common in other universities.*

**Maxime Rodrigus,**  
University of Mons, Belgium

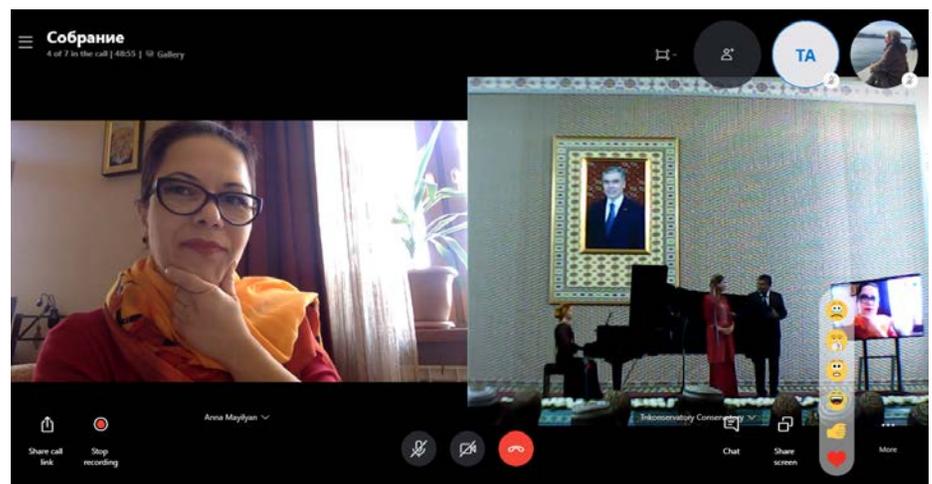


*I chose AUA because it is all in English and I could improve my level of English. What I liked the most from this experience is the community of Erasmus students. I like the safety of the country and the level of English at the university. Moreover, I really like AUA, the food in the cafeteria, the professors, their commitment to teach us to do our best in the future.*

**Adrian Garcia**  
University of Murcia, Spain

## ONLINE WORLD AND MUSIC

The existential threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought tremendous instability and uncertainty in our lives imposing new challenges and profound changes worldwide. The pandemic conditions are driving systemic conversions and adaptations at the country and individual levels while creating new possibilities in work and life. Likewise, the systems of



education everywhere have been facing the imperative to adjust to the circumstances to ensure

continuity. Without question, many policies and practices related to higher education,

including internationalization, will require new thinking and commensurate approaches.

In the pre-COVID-19 period, universities were using various modes of online learning to a lesser or greater extent, but now they have totally switched to online learning and assessment. Universities for the study of arts, in our case the national conservatory, are in more challenging situations. Our students need to acquire skills through rehearsals and on-stage performances. In normal times, they would play or sing in ensembles, choirs, orchestras, music theaters, and more. All these activities used to comprise the fundamental educational process of the conservatory. For

our students, it is unusual to do live music events as performers and artists need to see and feel their audiences, sense their satisfaction and assess their appreciation from cheers and applause. Sadly, these have been replaced with online likes and reactions.

However, the online format has also offered some advantages in the internationalization of institutions dedicated to the study of arts. Through the use of various online platforms, we were able to organize international masterclasses with outstanding artists, providing unique learning opportunities for our students. Another unprecedented activity is the music bridge organized between the Turkmen National Conservatory and the Yerevan

State Conservatory on May 15. During this five-hour musical meeting, the students performed classical renditions, and the lecturers offered feedback and shared professional experiences, which triggered planning future cooperation opportunities between the conservatories.

Learning from the prevalent conditions, we have realized the importance of internationalization and learned that effective means of cooperation across borders can be found in every situation.



## ORGANIZATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AT SHIRAK STATE UNIVERSITY

The situation caused by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic forced Shirak State University (ShSU) to introduce and implement new approaches in the organization of the educational process, as well as in the university management and administration.

Naturally, in this situation, distance learning became the primary and quite effective way of instruction with the use of modern online tools and platforms of electronic communication, telelearning and teleconferencing, such as Skype, Zoom, Moodle, etc. Although both students and faculty had to overcome some difficulties, this

experience contributed to the development of new abilities and skills in students, as well as among academic and administrative staff.



The computer equipment and programs acquired within the framework of various international cooperation programs, the platform created for e-learning, and the relevant training sessions contributed to the effective organization and implementation of distance learning, e-learning and overall management at ShSU. When needed, the University provided

laptops, equipment and necessary consulting support to students and staff who were having trouble adjusting to online learning. Due to these efforts, the pre-thesis defense, defense, and graduation activities are moving forward quite successfully.

Now ShSU is trying to continue cooperation with its European partner universities in a new format. In particular, the issues of virtual mobility, implementation of training sessions and research through distance learning and e-learning are in discussion with West University of Timisoara and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi in Romania.

We think that similar cooperation opportunities can also be discussed with Armenian partner universities.

## RECOGNITION CHALLENGES IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

The ENIC-NARIC centers together with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau closely monitored the impact of COVID-19 and its consequences on the recognition of foreign qualifications and the activities of national information centers around Europe. The synthesis report that will soon be available aims to identify the major short- and long-term challenges of recognition as a public service. Moreover, there is a need to develop solutions that will increase trust and help everyone in higher education to do more with less resources.

Based on the answers received from 42 ENIC-NARIC information centers, the following points can already be highlighted.

In many countries, the recognition of qualifications is perceived and thought of as a public service, and as such, its sustained continuation has been regarded as a priority.

Thus, almost all ENIC-NARIC networks have switched to telework. This change was realized rather quickly in those countries that had ratified legislation relevant to teleworking and were fully or partially equipped to support IT services for telework. There were very few centers that closed temporarily and reopened within two-three weeks upon resolving technical issues related to telework.

However, even when the transition to telework occurred as smoothly as possible, some ENIC-NARIC network centers faced the legal obligation to provide recognition attestations in hard copy, which have to be signed, stamped, and sent. This led to some employees of those centers to travel to work — albeit in compliance with the protection rules — to ensure fulfillment of their obligations.

It can also be noted that, like everyone else in this period of limitations, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a work-life balance. In the effort to adapt

to these unusual circumstances, some offices have developed guidelines for better managing telework. Nevertheless, despite all the efforts, recognition decisions may be delayed due to various external factors:

- Lack of access to records of similar decisions already made, if the records were not digitized;
- Difficulty of getting in contact with higher education institutions.

The coronavirus situation has resulted in a real drop in the number of applications, with the concomitant fear that numbers will soar after the crisis. One may also note that the recognition of qualifications is related to regulated professions, particularly in the health and medical fields. This has led some countries to speed up recognition processes for this type of qualifications, notably by shifting the final level of decision from national to regional.

For the future, it seems obvious that the emphasis will be on digitization, since this will ensure continuity of the whole process.

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# Erasmus+ BOOST Project Final Conference will take place online in **October 2020.**

## PROJECT PARTNERS

### ARMENIAN PARTNERS

- RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (RA MoESCS)
- Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatur Abovian (ASPU)
- American University of Armenia (AUA)
- Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas (YSC)
- Shirak State University after Mikayel Nalbandyan (ShSU)
- Vanadzor State University after Hovhannes Toumanyan (VSU)
- National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmEnic)

### EU PARTNERS

- Universitat Politecnica De Catalunya(UPC), Spain
- Instituto Superior Tecnico (IST), Portugal
- Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV), Spain
- Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Sweden
- Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech), Estonia



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