
One Word and Thousands of Memories!

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This article was written for a competition held by Charles University by the occasion of this year's 30th anniversary of existence of the Erasmus programme. The author is Valentina Appolonova from Tallinn University in Estonia, currently hosted by the Faculty of Education of Charles University.

My name is Valentina, I am 22 years old, my home country is Estonia. This semester I am an exchange student at Charles University in Prague, one of the oldest universities in Europe. I want to share my story with you, because Erasmus is an experience that has changed my life.



You probably already know that Erasmus is a EU student exchange programme providing opportunities to study, work, and volunteer, financed by the European Commission. I first got to know this programme when I was studying in high school, in my home city of Tallinn, and was invited to participate in the, Erasmus supported, Youth Exchange scheme. I remember thinking about the amount of assignments and work I had to do at home (the project was running during the school year time) and so made my decision to participate late on, ultimately joining the project at the last minute but in doing so, making a step towards some of the best experiences of my life. I was 17 years old back then and it was the first time I had an opportunity to meet people from other countries, communicate with them and do something together. It was a completely new experience for me to learn a topic in an informal environment with people of other nationalities; to get to know their cultures and have fun all together. The experience was simply mind-blowing!

Over later years I participated in nine more Erasmus+ projects; ranging from youth exchange to some training courses. By now I can say that Erasmus is truly the best experience of my life. Thanks to the programme I not only learned about various topics important in the EU and met people from other cultures but also travelled to amazing countries

(Turkey, Spain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, UK, Cyprus) that I would hardly have the opportunity to visit otherwise, being just



a student.

During the Erasmus project, I have learnt how to work in a group, be tolerant and respectful towards other cultures, listen actively and speak publicly in front of other Erasmus participants. In addition, the programme was a great opportunity to improve my English language skills and I gained greater motivation to learn other languages as well. I grew personally in being smart, kind, confident and good-looking; being truly inspired by the people I met. I became more active and initiative in my local community; the skills and knowledge I gained during my Erasmus experiences helping me in my everyday life.

In the near future, I am planning to discover other opportunities of the Erasmus programme; so far having participated in the Erasmus short-term projects and the longer-term exchange semester in Prague. Only a few years ago I could hardly imagine that I would have a chance to study in such a beautiful city in the heart of Europe, sharing my experience with others.

A very important thing I learned from being a participant of Erasmus is that there is no point in moving away from your country because you consider it 'bad' for some reason, if, at the same time, you don't do anything to make it better. Running from problems is always easier than solving them – but only in the short-term. You should learn how to appreciate your culture, language, country, whatever your background, and make a change in your life if needed; do not just wait for it to happen on its own!

