



## ***Building Bridges in a Multicultural European Arena: Calendar of Achievements and Events***

*Dr. Joseph Mifsud*

THE YEAR 2002- 2003 has been a very active year for the Socrates Office at the University of Malta.

### ***Socrates at the University of Malta***

#### ***Erasmus***

The University received around 210 Erasmus European students in the course of the year from various countries such as Belgium, Italy, France, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Austria, Spain, Finland, Germany and Portugal. The Socrates Office also sent a remarkable number of Erasmus Maltese students to several European countries namely: Italy, France, Spain, The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Portugal and the United Kingdom. (Official figures will be published at the end of the year). According to the mobility report published in January 2003 by the European Commission for the Academic year 2001/2, Malta registered a highly successful rate of 7% mobility for the eligible student population (the European Erasmus average for 2001/2 was 2%).

Various activities were held for both Maltese and European students. An Orientation Day was held at the start of each semester on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2002 and 7<sup>th</sup> February 2003 for the incoming Erasmus students. This consisted of a full morning of activities and talks introducing the students to the University and Malta. The Students' Council (KSU) and many student organisations helped out, taking care of welcoming their fellow students and introducing them to the University and its surroundings.

An *Intensive Language Preparation Course* (ILPC) was held in September 2002 for incoming Erasmus students and another will be held this coming September for which applications close at the end of May.

The European Commission awarded the *Erasmus University Charter* to the University of Malta. The Charter is a formal contract that confirms the University of Malta's participation in Erasmus for the duration of the *Socrates II* programme.

The Socrates Office organised many information and awareness sessions for both local and foreign students and University staff. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2002, the University of Malta in conjunction with European Universities participating in Erasmus and the European Commission celebrated the 1 millionth Erasmus student. The Minister of Education, The Hon. Dr. Louis Galea, unveiled a commemorative plaque in Students' House, the centre of student life on Campus. Ambassadors of EU member countries accredited to Malta, University officials and all past and present Erasmus beneficiaries, academics and students at the University were invited to participate in this event. To round off the celebrations all foreign and local Erasmus students were invited to meet the President of Malta, H.E. Professor Guido de Marco at the Palace in Valletta in the evening. A Faculty of Laws student, Joe Borg, who was studying at the University of Bologna, Italy, represented Malta at the celebrations in Brussels.

The Socrates Office received many visitors and various coordinators from partner universities and academics interested in establishing future Erasmus links with the University of Malta.

The launch of *Erasmus Exchange Applications 2003/4* was held between 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The official launch entitled *Passaport għall- Ewropa* was held on 11<sup>th</sup> February

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and the remaining two days were dedicated to information days for future Maltese Erasmus students.

Another important event was the launch of the *Socrates- Erasmus Student Hotline*, a joint venture between the Socrates Office and *Go Mobile*. The aim of this hotline is to enable Socrates- Erasmus students following an exchange in Malta and Maltese Erasmus students in a European country to contact their Erasmus coordinators at the University of Malta in case of an emergency, day or night. The Hotline number is given out to all Erasmus students on arrival in Malta or prior to the departure of Maltese Erasmus students.

The University of Malta has recently had a *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS) Counsellors visit on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2003. The visit was a positive one and the University of Malta is in line with the Bologna Declaration which calls for the implementation of ECTS as an internal system of accreditation.

Through the Socrates-Erasmus programme the University is organising and participating in several projects, namely, a European Masters Programme in Environmental Education (EMPEE), coordinated by the UoM in partnership with eight different countries. The first project meeting will take place in June 2003.

For the third consecutive year, students and academic staff from the Communication Therapy Division at the Institute of Health Care will be participating in the annual Erasmus Intensive Programme (IP) in Speech Therapy. The last session of the Intensive Programme was held at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland in August 2002.

The University of Malta is participating in a large number of *Erasmus Thematic Networks* (TNs) in various subject areas including Geography, Physics, Mathematics and Health Sciences.

### **Grundtvig**

The University of Malta has been active in proposing project ideas for funding through the Socrates programme under the Grundtvig (Adult Education) and Minerva (Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and Open Distance Learning (ODL) in education).

The University has been awarded a Grundtvig I project entitled *Community centres promoting sustainable living* which is being coordinated by the Faculty of Education. It is also partner in the EUROSAFE project which deals with health and safety in the workplace as well as in the SAIL project (*Specialised Animated Interactive Learning*).

The University of Malta has also been involved in a number of Grundtvig 2, Adult Education projects, application round of March 2003 and is involved in four projects. The European Commission is currently evaluating the projects:

1. ELIA - Explore Learning on Internet by Adults;
2. ELLA - Explore Learning Language by Adults;
3. SDIT - Sustainable Development and Modern Information Technologies in Adult Education;  
EPPLA - Engaging Prisoners in Lifelong Learning Activities;
4. Development of Competencies and Methodologies in the field of Adult Education with the Focus of ICT.

### **Comenius**

Comenius 2.1 – *European cooperation projects for the training of school education staff* is designed to promote the professional development of all types of staff involved in school education. It does so by supporting transnational cooperation projects and mobility activities.

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European cooperation projects for the training of school education staff normally cover one of the following activities:

- Projects which create and deliver training courses for educational staff;
- Projects which develop curricula for the initial training of teachers;
- Projects which promote the mobility of student teachers;
- Projects which develop teaching strategies, methods and materials for specific learner groups.

The University of Malta is involved in three Comenius 2.1 projects. These are:

1. *Community, Diversity, Communication* - Building bridges in the multicultural European Classroom. This project is coordinated by Denmark and the Department of Arts and Languages in Education, Faculty of Education is one of the partners;
2. Developing *Sustaining and Evaluating Sustainable Practices in European Primary Schools* (SEEPS) - The United Kingdom is the coordinating country of this project and the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technical Education, Faculty of Education is involved as a partner;
3. MIND/Critical Thinking for Successful Future Career in EU - This project is coordinated by Lithuania and the Department of Education Studies, Faculty of Education is a partner in this project.

*Further information with reference to the Socrates Programme and its various actions may be found at the Socrates website: <http://www.socrates.um.edu.mt> you may also call the Socrates Office on tel no: [+356] 2340 2204.*

### ***The European Unit at the University of Malta***

The European Unit was created in 2000 and is the central contact point for European funded projects at the University of Malta. Its areas of activity are diverse, focusing on the different aspects related to the Europeanisation process being undertaken by the University. Via the European Unit, the University of Malta is an active member of a number of University Groups and Networks namely:

- The Compostela Group of Universities <http://www.grupocompostela.org/>;  
the Utrecht Network <http://www.utrecht-network.org>;
- the Santander Group <http://sgroup.be/>;
- the European Access Network (EAN) <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/ean/>;
- the European University Association (EUA) <http://www.unige.ch/eua/>;
- the European Association for International Education (EAIE) <http://www.eaie.org/> and
- the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) <http://www.eurashe.be/>

Through these links the University of Malta has a vast portfolio of project partners.

### ***The Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) and Marie Curie Action***

The University of Malta is the main research organisation in Malta. *The European Unit* is responsible for coordinating the FP6 at the University and disseminating information about Research opportunities to researchers.

On 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2002 the European Unit in collaboration with the *Malta Council for Science and Technology* (MCST) organised a conference entitled *Exploring Industry - Academia Synergies in Research and Innovation*. This was also the official launch of the *EU Sixth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration* (FP6). Partners in this event included the *Compostela* Group of Universities which imparted a strong European flavour. Officials from the European Commission within the DG Research,

and local experts gave presentations about various subjects ranging from health and food safety to technology transfer and research innovation.

The European Unit also organised the *Marie Curie Launch Seminar* on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2003, in conjunction with MCST and the Federation of Industry (FOI). This one-day seminar, which was held in the new Gateway Building on Campus, attracted over one hundred and forty participants who showed a keen interest in the various Marie Curie Actions. The Marie Curie Actions are part of the *Human Resources and Mobility* area within the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), which is the main instrument for research funding in Europe. The Actions are open to researchers in all fields of scientific and technological research from the EU member States and candidate countries.

The University of Malta is also participating in some FP5 projects in particular the *Biobank Project* which intends to be an evolving and dynamic instrument at the service of clinical networks, academic researchers, private companies and the whole European Scientific Community.

Another FP5 funded project is intended to determine the genetic risks of Neurological Disease in relation to exposure to chemicals in the environment. Studies to date of the interactions between chemical exposure and genes have suffered from statistical weakness due to relatively small numbers. There is also the problem of different levels of exposure in different countries, which may obscure relationships where exposure is well controlled. The inclusion of a Maltese population will increase numbers even further, which is always an important asset in the study of multifactorial diseases.

The Department of Biology is also currently involved in an EU funded project under FP5. The objective of the *Fauna Europaea Project* will be to assemble a database of the scientific names and distribution of all living multicellular European land and fresh-water animals. Experts in taxonomy will provide data of all species currently known in Europe. Together, these data will form a huge database, which will be accessible to everyone. The University of Amsterdam coordinates the project assisted by the University of Copenhagen and the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Once the *Fauna Europaea* database is finished it will provide a unique reference for many groups such as scientists, governments, industries, conservation communities and educational programmes.

The development of existing earthquake data infrastructures towards a *Mediterranean-European Rapid Earthquake Data Information and Archiving Network* extension has been the main goal set out through the *MEREDIAN-2 Project*, in which the Department of Physics is an active partner. International infrastructure for cross-border earthquake data exchange, essential for the European seismological research and seismic hazard mitigation community, lacks behind in comparison to investments in national earthquake data infrastructure.

Other consortia involving Maltese partners that have submitted project proposals under FP5 include the *Bioplatform* and the *Dante consortia*. In the context of FP5 Malta submitted a total of 19 projects under various thematic areas of which 14 were accepted (74% success rate). This augurs very well for future participation in the *EU's Sixth Framework Programme for Scientific and Technological Demonstration* (FP6).

### **Leonardo da Vinci**

The University of Malta is currently involved in a number of Leonardo da Vinci projects from different action areas. The University coordinated a LdV Mobility project titled *Improving Skills and Developing Employment Profiles of Scientists* which was coordinated by the Workers Participation Development Centre and gave the opportunity to university staff to train abroad for a period of time. The University is also partner in a pilot project called *Innovate*, which is

coordinated by the Department of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering, Faculty of Engineering along with its European partners. The aim of the project is to develop a new method of transnational open and distance vocational training programmes in the field of Surface Engineering.

The University will also be coordinating three new Mobility projects:

- Improving the skills and competence of Laboratory Managers within the Faculty of Engineering - Upgrading Lab Managers, Faculty of Engineering;
- Nursing Across European Borders – Institute of Health Care (Nursing);
- What cultural factors impact business relations? Cultural Marketing - Centre for Communication Technology.

The European Unit also took an active part organising information sessions for University students and staff.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 27<sup>th</sup> November and 10<sup>th</sup> December respectively in conjunction with KSU, the European Unit organised *Generation Europe: Debating Europe's Future Together*. The topics debated were:

- The Role of National Parliaments, Dr. Michael Frendo was the keynote speaker;
- The European Citizen and Foreign Policy which had as its keynote speaker, Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott;
- The EU in a Globalised World which involved a lively discussion between Dr. Alfred Sant, Leader of the Opposition and Mr. Charis Xirouchakis, Council of the European Unit.

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2003, the European Unit in conjunction with the Delegation for European Communities in Malta held a Q&A session *You and the EU...* with the participation of H.E. Ronald Gallimore. All students and staff present took an active part in fielding questions concerning the changes in the field of Higher Education that European Accession would bring about. □

*Further information with reference to the services offered by the European Unit may be found at the website <http://www.eu-unit.um.edu.mt> or you may call at tel no: [+356] 2340 3180.*

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