Erasmus without borders

The great 15th century Dutch humanist and theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam was twenty-six (26) years old when Christopher Columbus set foot in the New World. He was fifty-five (55) when an expedition led by Magellan became the first to circumnavigate the world. Between the time of Erasmus’ birth in 1466 and the 70th year of his life in 1536, the world had evolved from relatively small communities that were feudal and locally organised, into societies trading across the globe. It was the Age of Discovery, and it was also the age that saw the invention of the printing press, which had just been developed in Europe.

The printing press made it possible to disseminate knowledge much more widely, just as Magellan’s expedition around the world can be seen as the first physical example of what is now called globalisation. The world’s physical horizons expanded, but the world became smaller in terms of gaining knowledge. Different parts of the world, its peoples and its cultures came increasingly within the reach of Western science.

As you know, Erasmus was one of the first and best known exponents of this ‘internationalisation of science’. He travelled extensively and visited many European cities during his lifetime – from London to Rome. Above all, he journeyed in intellectual terms: he developed his ideas in dialogue with the greatest thinkers of his time, individuals like Martin Luther and Sir Thomas More.

Erasmus’s work is characterised by his openness of mind and willingness to engage in critical, intellectual dialogue and he is still a source of inspiration today. The way that Erasmus of Rotterdam worked can still be used by scholars today. Even in the age of space exploration and internet communication, many scholars can still use an example like Erasmus.

I therefore call upon you to follow in the footsteps of Erasmus. We should engage ourselves in academic behaviour characterized by the absence of physical or ideological restraints. Erasmus without borders.
Complex, global issues require a *universitas* in the literal sense of the word: a *community of educators and academics*.

In this environment, scientific progress is made in an international arena, in which cross-pollination occurs between different disciplines, and in which scholars engage each other in academic debate with open minds that are free of dogmas.

This implies that we must have the courage to *acknowledge* each other’s individuality in terms of our different views, customs, characters and physical appearance. We must be *willing to learn* from the thousands of students and staff from all corners of the world who populate our campus every day. We must be willing to learn *from each other’s experiences and ideas*, and indeed from each other’s problems, just as Erasmus advocated tolerance of different views.

**Because real innovation and progress occur when we have the courage to cross borders and allow new ideas to permeate our thinking.**

This conviction was the basis for formulating our university strategy for the period *twenty-fourteen to twenty-eighteen* (2014-2018). Our strategy is very much about increasing co-operation and critical dialogue with international partners. We want to give an even more cordial welcome to the academic explorers and the present-day Magellans, the international talent that enriches our research and education.
What are we going to do to achieve this goal?

Faculties and the Executive Board have jointly formulated ambitious aims for the internationalisation of education: they want more international degree programmes, more student exchange, more international ‘tracks’ and more international research collaboration, to mention just a few examples.

I see it as my duty to provide the best possible support to the faculties, and to act as a facilitator for this. We will combine our knowledge and expertise in the field of internationalisation, and make it as widely available as possible so that we can learn from each other.

A range of core themes will provide support to our fully-grown internationalisation strategy. The Executive Board has appointed Ellen Hey, Professor of International Law, Special Advisor to the Executive Board for the internationalisation of education.

Together with all of you, Ellen Hey will initiate activities that will make Erasmus University Rotterdam a truly international university in the coming years, and ensure that in 2018 we will qualify for the special quality mark for internationalisation that is issued by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

The four core themes on which we will focus are:

**Theme 1: Internationalisation of the Bachelor and Master degree programmes**

We have successfully developed eleven (11) international Bachelor degree programmes in recent years. Next, we will develop international Master degree programmes. Our aim is to offer new, more differentiated Master degree programmes to a broader target group, and also attract post-initial students.

We will also take up the challenge of creating an international classroom in which Dutch and international students and lecturers co-operate in a way that produces added value. We will support degree programmes to devise international learning outcomes, and to find the right partners and to develop international joint education programmes.
The Support Programme National and International Research Projects – the SNIP fund – will make it possible to cover the investment costs associated with the formation of consortia.

We expect students will be encouraged to choose Erasmus University Rotterdam for at least a part of their studies when we can offer more international programmes with prominent international partners. Moreover, we will introduce a mobility scheme to reduce the number of obstacles that discourage our Dutch students from following an international study exchange.

**Theme 2: Hospitality and services**

We will further develop our facilities and services for international students and staff, for example by improving the availability of Dutch courses for our international degree students. We will launch more activities to improve employability of all students in the Rotterdam region.

We are working with the Municipality of Rotterdam and others to develop a comprehensive social programme so that new students and staff feel at home in the city more quickly. Erasmus University College is already a good example of this. Here, students can familiarise themselves with the city right from the start using the College’s community services. Our study and student organisations will also be closely involved in this area.

**Theme 3: Academic partnerships and institutional consortia**

We will make it easier for faculties to collaborate within the field of internationalisation, and we will do this by listing all of our existing international contacts and agreements so that faculties can identify common denominators, like regions, countries or universities. Examples of co-operation may include structural student and staff exchanges, or a joint summer school.

There are other networks outside of the traditional university ones. For example, we are currently holding discussions with the Clinton Global Initiative University Network, which makes it possible for students at participating universities to implement their own projects aimed at tackling global challenges. This network is very much in line with our university’s
profile, and would give our students a wonderful opportunity to present themselves on an international stage.

**Theme 4: International project development and acquisition**

Erasmus University Rotterdam does not yet make sufficient use of international funds aimed at internationalising education. But since the end of last year, we have been focusing more intensively on the EU programme for education and sports called **Erasmus+**. With the help of a grants advisor we have had a successful first year with Erasmus+. Three of our projects will receive funding, and we have initiated five further proposals through the advisor. In the next few years, we will submit more large-scale proposals that will further strengthen the international profile of our university.

We could promote our expertise in the field of student success much more internationally, particularly with regard to the European knowledge programmes. By actively participating in European co-operation programmes, we can put our educational philosophy firmly on the European map.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

International orientation is never a goal in itself. Thanks to Magellan and the expeditions of many other explorers after him, we have an accurate map of our global playing field. For us, internationalisation is crucial to realising our ambition to play a leading role in global science and education. We want to be a key player in the global knowledge network in which critical dialogue and the exchange of knowledge are a matter of course. Only by being an integral part of the international community can we continue to sharpen our minds and give Erasmus of Rotterdam, the spiritual father of our university, the respect that he deserves.

Thank you for your attention.