



HERMES

Higher Education and Research area
EUROPE and MIDDLE EAST

Minutes

Kick-off Meeting HERMES

October 10th and 11th

in Marseille (Villa Valmer)

Presence:

Aix-Marseille University / TETHYS: Michel AUTRIC, Kathleen BEREZAY, Marine BUZARE, Loïc OROFINO, Marie TORTEL

Saint-Joseph University: Antoine HOKAYEM

University of the Balearic Islands: Ricardo SAGRERA GAZELEY

University of Cadiz: Carlos RIOJA DEL RIO

University of Cyprus: Athanasios GAGATSIS

University of Genoa: Chiara COLELLA, Maria Rita CIFARELLI

University of Palermo: Pasquale ASSENNATO

University of Toulon: Eric BOUTIN, Karine BENET-CATTIN

University of Turin: Johan FAURIAT

An Najah National University: Maher NATSHEH

Arab International University: Sara AL AHMAD

Birzeit University: Wael HASHLAMOUN

Holy Spirit University of Kaslik: Rima MATTAR

Princess Sumaya University for Technology: Omar HASAN, Mohd MISMAR

University of Balamand: Walid MOUBAYED

University of Jordan: Sinaria JABBAR

Yarmouk University: Ahmad F. AL-AJLOUNI

Agence Europe-Education-Formation France (2E2F): Camille CHOLET

Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie: Mireille EL RAYESS

Municipality of Marseille : Michelle REYNAUD, Frédéric OLIVO, Florence REY

After the welcome speeches of M. Michel Autric (director of the Euro-Mediterranean Universities Network TETHYS and coordinator of the HERMES programme), Mrs. Michelle Reynaud (director of International and European Relations of the Municipality of Marseille), and Mrs. Hala KEYROUZ (Consul General of Lebanon in Marseille), Kathleen Berezay (KB) thanked the Municipality of Marseille for their warm welcome and the partners for being here. Before presenting the agenda of the day, she pointed out the fact that the coordinating team wanted this meeting to be interactive in order to have an exchange of good practices between the less and the more experienced universities of the consortium.

The work day began with the presentation of Mrs. Camille Cholet, Erasmus Mundus National Contact Point for the Agence 2E2F, who talked about the Erasmus Mundus programme Action 2 and Erasmus +, the 2014-2020 European programming in education and training matters.

After that, KB presented the HERMES programme, its objectives, its management and its mobility scheme. At this point, the distinction between Target Group 1, Target Group 2 and Target Group 3 was made, and the fact it was not possible to accept doctorates for the second cohort was stressed. **As a matter of fact, all the doctorates will have to be selected during the first call for applications.** Also, the Partner University Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) took the floor to explain that the durations of mobility presented were not always adapted to the Jordanian education system. A roundtable was made to gather the wishes in terms of nature and duration of scholarships and KB added that it was something to **write in the academic offers.** Finally, the thematic fields were discussed in the sense that the academic offers are supposed to cover all the possible academic fields but it was agreed that **the students applying for prioritized fields will be put on the top of the selection list.** The prioritized fields of the HERMES programme are: Business Studies, Management Science; Education, Teacher Training; Engineering, Technology; Mathematics, Informatics; Medical Sciences; Natural Sciences; Social Sciences.

Then, KB let the Consortium members take the floor for 5 minutes each in order to present the different systems, the academic offers for the incoming students and the preferences for the outgoing ones. The associated partner Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) also presented itself. It has been decided that all the PowerPoint presentations will be transferred together with the minutes of the Kick-off meetings to the Consortium members.

During the afternoon, KB talked about the budget and financial management of the HERMES programme. She began with giving an overview of the HERMES budget according to the Grant Agreement signed with the European Commission. **The total budget is 2 998 075 €** and divided as follows:

- 210 000 € are for the organization of the programme: on this amount, **a lump sum of 5000 € is granted to each partner** to perform the management of the programme, **10 000 € are given to the co-coordinator** to carry out his missions and 100 000 € compounds the common pot which has been used for the organization of the kick-off meeting and will be used for the end-meeting (hotel, dinner), the general management of the programme, the activities of promotion and the administrative costs;
- 2 123 700 € are for the scholarships, corresponding to monthly allowances of 1000 € per month for undergraduate and master students, 1500 € per month for PhD, 1800 € for post-doc and 2500 € for staff. It has been reminded that according to the Erasmus Mundus financial rules, **these amounts cannot be reduced**, and the University of Palermo asked the Coordinator to add this sentence to the Memorandum of Understanding;
- 221 500 € are for the travel costs, more specifically one flight ticket round trip per scholarship holder, and the visa and residence permit costs if the budget allows it;
- 318 000 € are for the participation costs: 3000 € per year / per inscription are granted to scholarships of 10 months or higher to pay tuition fees, language courses and administrative costs;
- and 124 875 € are for the mandatory insurance.

For the first category, KB explained that the European Commission does not request any financial justifications for the payments, but the accounting officer of Aix-Marseille University asks for all supporting documents related to expenditure. Consequently, **the partners will have to report about the use of their lump sum and give the supporting documents at the end of the HERMES programme.** For the other categories, it has been reminded to the partners **that we need the official documents.** Each partner is responsible for sending us the certified copies of the originals and keeping safe the original dated documents in case of audit, and giving it to us on demand.

After that, Marine Buzaré (MB) described the organisation of the mobility. She explained that two cohorts are planned under the HERMES programme. **The first call for applications will take place from November 2013 to January 2014 and the second one from November 2014 to January 2015.** In order to do so, the partners have been asked to provide their academic offers by the end of October 2013, the first week of November 2013 at the latest for the first call for applications which should open by November 2013 if the opening of the website is not delayed. The call for applications will be open at least fifty days, and **the candidates will be able to apply online only.**

Concerning the application, the compulsory documents to be provided by the applicants were discussed. For undergraduate and master students, the Consortium members agreed on the CV in English, the copy of ID and passport, the signed statement on oath, the transcripts of records since the entry at the university, the letters of recommendation, the language certificate (if specified in the academic offer), and the certificate of status (for TG3). About the description of the content of the courses at the home university for the year the student will spend abroad (for exchange student) and the description of the course content since the entrance at the university, there was a debate between the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, the University of Balamand, PSUT, Birzeit University and the University of Genoa. Finally, it was decided that **at this stage, we will not ask for these two documents**, but each Partner University is free to add specific requirements in its academic offer or to contact the applicants they find interesting and for which they would like to have more documents before the Selection Committee. About the signed **learning agreement** (for exchange student), it has been specified that the document will have to be **signed by the home university only at this stage** and that the signature of the home institution had to be added on the second page. Finally, for TG1 and TG2, the applicants can provide either **a student card or a certificate of registration.** Once the scholarship holders are selected, the host university will have the choice to ask for more documents.

As for doctorates, post-doctorates and staff, the Consortium members agreed on the CV in English, the copy of ID and passport, the signed statement on oath, a presentation of intended research project and objectives set for the exchanges approved by the research director or the laboratory director of the home university, and the details of the academic work and publications (teachers and researchers only) and/or a description of professional responsibilities (administrative staff). The scanned copy of the acceptance letter signed by the hosting laboratory or administrative service approving the scholarship holder's project was more problematic since the difficulty to have answers from supervisors has been stressed. Nevertheless, MB has exposed the risk that doctorates and post-doctorates may not be able to enter a laboratory without contacting it prior to the arrival. In that sense, a letter of acceptance from the host laboratory will be a guarantee for the candidate to take into consideration at the selection stage. Therefore, it has been decided that **this letter would not be compulsory, but the applications including this document would be prioritized.**

Then, a decision had to be made about the criteria to use at the different stages of the process of selection. The main point to clarify was to know if the selection should be done upon the basis of all the criteria or if we should use some of these criteria first, and the rest of these criteria during the Selection Committee. The following process has finally been agreed on:

- The home universities validate their student's applications TG1 (eligibility check);
- The home universities provide a ranking list to the 1st choice university and to the coordinator on the basis of **1. Academic excellence (grades) 2. Language requirements 3. Quality of application (supporting documents) / motivation 4. Priority fields;**
- The co-coordinator validates the application for TG2 and TG3 students;
- The host universities make a pre-selection and rankings for each level of grant and each thematic fields on the basis of the previous criteria;

- The final selection of candidates will be made by the Selection Committee composed of one representative per partner and associate (consultative role) on the basis of the previous criteria as well as the relevance of mobility for the host institution and existing and future cooperations, the equity consideration for TG1-2-3, the equal geographic representation of the partner universities in the mobility scheme, the gender and socio-economic equality and the brain drain prevention.

Moreover, ANNU expressed that TG2 and TG3 should be “sponsored” by a partner university to have a contract similar to the one signed with the TG1. Indeed, the validation of a partner university would provide a guarantee for these students. The KB’s fear was that it could limit the chances of these students to apply. Therefore, it could be helpful for the TG2 and TG3 candidates to have this kind of support but it should neither be compulsory nor affects the chances of selection of these categories.

At every stage, an actual and a reserve lists are to be provided.

Concerning the admission, the different steps were described:

- The host universities will be contacted by the Coordinator to verify its academic availability to welcome the selected candidates;

- The selected candidates will be contacted by the Coordinator proposing the scholarship offer;

- If the selected candidates accept the offer, the organisation of her/his mobility can start.

At this point, the partner universities are in charge of organizing the students’ arrival and mobility. For the partners who are able to do so, they have to buy the outgoing and incoming candidates flight ticket and provide them insurance. They also have to give pre-arrival information on visa / residence permit, accommodation, and so on.

On the second day of the Kick-off meeting, it was important to talk about the implementation of the mobility that we did not have enough time to present during the first day. Firstly, KB reminded the Partner Universities are responsible for the organisation of mobility and support services for the scholarship holders during the mobility. Then, each Partner University presented briefly its education system. PSUT brought back the issue of the differences of academic durations between the Partner Universities. In order to guarantee the academic recognition, the learning agreement, the work plan, the transcript of records and the report (for staff) were presented. Finally, KB stressed the fact that **in the case of a scholarship of less than 10 months, the host university will exonerate the students from paying tuition fees**. Finally, KB let the floor open to the participants to discuss the potential challenges that the implementation of the mobility under the HERMES programme could bring out.

1. The Syrian students

The Arab International University explained that there are no legal problems preventing the Syrian students from participating in Erasmus Mundus projects, since they can travel and have access to internet. Nevertheless, the Arab International University has made its point clear that **the Partner Universities have to help the Syrian students in the visa process**. Indeed, in order to have a visa, they have to go to Lebanon, and it is sometimes hard to have an appointment. Some must even go to Jordan. An advice to give is for example to fly to Europe without any transit, otherwise the Syrian students will have to ask for an additional visa called “transit visa”. Considering all these difficulties, **the Arab International University also asked for a reimbursement of the visa expenses** (fees and travel costs).

2. Security matters in the Middle-East Region

The Palestinian Partner Universities explained that the incoming students to Palestine as well as Lebanese people have to apply for a visa to Israel which might be denied, to then being able to come to Palestine. Similarly, Palestinians have to travel through Jordan. Consequently, there might be scholarships postponed.

About the issue of visas, **Camille Cholet suggested that Aix-Marseille University contacts the embassies in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine when it comes to the visa demands**.

Moreover, the Middle East Partner Universities were worried about the fact that sometimes, the embassies prevent people from entering a Middle East country because of “security matters”. If it happens while a scholarship holder is about to come in a Middle East Partner University concerned by the “security matter” or is already there, **is there the possibility to go to a Middle East Partner University which is not concerned by this issue?** (Question to the European Commission)

After that, MB presented the quality assurance and evaluation of the HERMES programme. Three aspects have to be assessed: the quality of internal communication between partners and external communication (availability and clarity of information), the quality of the selection process (transparency, assistance to the candidates, feedback post-call) and the quality of the services offered to the scholarship holders. In order to do so, several tools will be used throughout the duration of the programme: regular video meetings, a targeted advertising and careful selection process, the number and quality of the applications received, a follow-up of the scholarship holders by the contact person of the host university, individual assessment by students and staff at the midterm and end of their mobility (questionnaires), examinations' results, diploma, thesis, research collaborations, recognition of mobility, regular reports from the partners to the coordinator. The scholarship holders and the EACEA will also be invited to the meetings. The expected results are the arranging of a meeting once a year to evaluate the project's results, the publication of a report by the steering committee and 4 external experts (2 from Europe and 2 from the Middle East). We truly hope that this will allow to assess the performance of the project during its life time, to measure and highlight the potential weak points, and to define future activities to implement in order to improve the quality of the HERMES programme.

About the reporting, MB explained that in the frame of the first cohort, a first technical progress report is due to the European Commission by the 1st September 2014 (with the MoU) and a second technical and financial report is due by the 1st February 2015. In the frame of the second cohort, a third technical and financial progress report is due by the 1st February 2016. At the end of the programme, that is to say within the two months after the official ending date of the HERMES programme (14/07/2017), a final report is expected. The technical report contains details of the organisation of the mobility, the management and cooperation mechanisms of the partnership, the promotion policy, the application, selection and decision procedure, the quality assurance and the recognition of mobility, the implementation of mobility, the administrative, financial and academic follow-up, the assistance to scholarship holders and the mobility records of all students and staff. The financial part contains the financial statements of the occurred expenditures (verification that 70% of the pre-financing payment have been used).

MB pointed out that in order for Aix-Marseille University to deliver the report in a timely manner to the European Commission, **the partners have to provide their feedback to the Coordinator by June 2014, November 2014, and November 2015.**

After that, MB presented the objectives and the tools of the communication and visibility strategy of the HERMES programme. This strategy aims to disseminate as much and as broadly as possible about the HERMES programme, to attract excellent scholarship holders, and to involve the local institutions, companies and the press. The Consortium has several tools at its disposal: the website of the HERMES programme and the ones of the partners and associates, the use of Social networks to help create a student community, the writing of a newsletter once a quarter (web format) and the edition of leaflets, flyers, posters, brochures, folders, the organization of promotion and awareness raising events, and the dissemination of press releases in every country of the consortium. Also, in order to strengthen the image of the HERMES programme, partners were invited to suggest ideas of logos. These ideas were presented during the Kick-off Meeting and the HERMES logo was chosen by a majority vote.

Moreover, MB presented the actors of this strategy. She outlined the responsibilities of the partner universities as well as the associated partners who play a fundamental role in the success of this strategy. Indeed, each partner university is in charge of attracting the best scholarship holders and disseminating the results of the programme in their country. In order to do that, they have to communicate on their website and newsletters on the HERMES programme's activities and results, spread the HERMES communication tools, organize promotion and awareness raising events about the programme and act as a link with the media. Associates have to do the same but more specifically, they are asked to promote the project to remote universities and vulnerable groups, help students find internships in the framework of their study program, and contribute to the sustainability of the project.

The issue of the recruitment of the TG2 and TG3 was then brought up. The AUF and Tethys outlined how they intended to recruit TG2. Also, KB named all the partners associated to the programme and explained that **the majority of the scholarships are for TG1.** She also indicated that **the only universities**

able to host scholarship holders are the members of the consortium. For the recruitment of TG3, KB stressed the role of the associate United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

To the question “How to convince European students to study in the Middle East region?”, the suggestion was made that Middle-East partner universities gather feedback from the European students studying in their universities and give it to the Coordinator in order to publish it on the website and in the newsletter.

After that, KB presented the Memorandum of Understanding or Consortium Agreement. It was decided to study it together page by page and to stop when there is an observation. **The main changes to make are:**

- Definitions for associated partners and consortium/steering committee;
- The mention of the selection criteria: four criteria are taken into account at the ranking stage, the rest are used during the Selection Committee;
- The role of the associated partners in the HERMES promotion and communication strategy has to be mentioned;
- The amount and distribution of the lump sum have been discussed. The consortium finally agreed on 5000 € per partner transferred by the Coordinator in three times according to the reception of the EU grant by the Coordinator (50% at the signature of the Consortium Agreement, 30% at the reception of the second part of the EU grant, 20% at the reception of the third part of the EU grant). It has been outlined that additional transfers would be possible in exceptional cases. The need to justify the expenses prior to the second and the third transfers of the lump sums has been removed, but the accounting officer of Aix-Marseille University will need the supporting documents related to expenditure at the end of the HERMES programme;
- About the transfer of scholarships and related costs, the proposal of the Coordinator was to transfer the scholarships, travel costs, participation costs and insurance to the partners of Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Europe for incoming students. Considering the situation in Syria and the fact that Palestinian partner universities would prefer not to receive the scholarships, travel costs and insurance, the new proposal was to transfer the scholarships, travel costs, participation costs and insurance to the partners of Lebanon, Jordan, and Europe for incoming students and outgoing students to Palestine. Thus, Palestinian partners would receive only participation costs. For the Arab International University, if applicable, we would transfer the amounts related to the mobilities directly to the students. Some issues about the insurance and travel costs were finally brought out by the Italian partner universities. The Coordinator has to find a solution in intern;
- The financial documents needed for the reporting have been clarified.

The Consortium Agreement will be revised to reflect the perspectives gathered during the Kick-off Meeting and it will be sent to the partner universities.

Then, it was planned to **elect the sustainability team but the time was too short to do that so it has been rescheduled to the first Selection committee.**

Finally, **the question of the organisation of the next meetings was brought out.** KB explained that we need to organize five other meetings within the framework of the HERMES programme: the first Selection Meeting in March 2014, the first Consortium Meeting in October/November 2014, the second Selection Meeting in March 2015, the second Consortium Meeting in October/November 2015 and the End Meeting in 2017. The End Meeting will be organized in Marseille. As for the others, each participant has to pay on his lump sum for his travel costs and accommodation, so the partner university receiving will only have extra costs related to the organization of a meeting. From this information, Saint-Joseph University offered to organize the first selection meeting, the University of Cadiz and the University of Palermo proposed themselves for the first consortium meeting, Princess Sumaya for Technologies accepted to host the second selection committee and University of the Balearic Islands offered to organize the second consortium meeting.

After that, KB and MB thanked the consortium for its active participation to the HERMES Kick-off meeting and the Municipality of Marseille for their warm welcome. Finally, M. Cyril ROBIN-CHAMPIGNEUL (head of the European Commission Representation in Marseille) ended the work day welcoming the fact that the HERMES programme fits perfectly with the European policy on the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation matter and wishing a good luck to the HERMES programme.