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F R I E N D S

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME, KEY ACTION 2
CAPACITY BUILDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Furthering International Relations Capacities and Intercultural Engagement to Nurture
Campus Diversity and to Support Internationalisation at Home
(FRIENDS)**

8th WEBINAR
7th May 2020

MINUTES

Venue: online session at gotomeeting.com

Attendees: Representatives of VUM, BMU, SUT, IAU, RTC, SRU, DIU, APU, BUC, SLU, UC, CTU, PSU and MSU

The following HEIs were not present: RIM and PYU

1. Project progress and ongoing activities

Christina Armutlieva, FRIENDS project coordinator welcomed the webinar participants and informed them that the state of emergency in Bulgaria will be lifted on 14 May 2020 with life and work having already started to normalize in the country and at VUM. She expressed the hope that the COVID-19 restrictions and limitations across all FRIENDS countries will be soon eased too. In any case, based on the data and information collected from the project partners that fed into the Progress Report it is safe to state that the consortium did really well during these testing times with no major delays faced or deviations from the original work plan occurred. As agreed in April 2020, due to COVID-19 the Student Boot Camp start will be postponed by 5-7 weeks which should not affect the overall workflow and progress in the progress. In regard with the Student Boot Camp start's slight postponement and in line with the original application form, it is fully acceptable to submit the 15 digital stories per PC HEIs that is one of WP3's key indicators by 14 June 2020. The same refers to the minimum number of students to complete the IACD MOOC during its initial run. Bill Shields from SRU reported on difficulties reaching out to students at the moment due to the fact that many of them had gone back to their homes in remote provinces where internet access is highly problematic. Christina agreed that this is a serious challenge and suggested that at this point during the Intercultural Passport's piloting phase the partners focus on and provide enhanced support to students (15 per PC HEIs) who are in town and have internet access. At project's exploitation phase when hopefully all students will be back to the universities, the 12 PC HEIs will be able to extend the scope of targeted students and increase significantly their number.

In addition, Christina outlined how important it is to start preparing for the FRIENDS Teahouses activities' upcoming start in WP4. Most of the 12 PC HEIs have already identified the space where their FRIENDS Teahouse will be established. Ideally, the venue for the multicultural social hub should be in close proximity to PC HEIs' IROs. All 12 HEIs have their project equipment already delivered and it is highly important that the equipment is placed in service as soon as possible after the delivery. In view of the COVID-19 lockdowns, some of the PC HEIs had not been able to install the equipment yet at their FRIENDS Teahouse, nevertheless they are using it for the purposes of project administrative work and student digital storytelling or had it installed temporarily at another office. Christina stressed that the preparations for the FRIENDS Teahouses' operation should be resumed as soon as the COVID-19 crisis is over and PC HEIs staff members are back to campus. The establishment and operation of the FRIENDS Teahouses will be at the heart of project activities during Year 3 when plenty of project results exploitation activities and events are planned to take place.

Finally, Christina mentioned that the partner meeting in Budapest that was cancelled in March 2020 could still take place during Year 3 with the aim to strengthen partners' exploitation efforts and sustainability plans as well as to streamline the processes of project evidence collection and reporting in view of the upcoming project end and subsequent final report. The meeting could take place in late June 2021 but its timing should be confirmed later and only after and if prior authorization is obtained from EACEA.

2. Progress Report content and submission

Christina thanked once again the partners for all their contribution and inputs in the process of drafting the technical and financial parts of the due Progress Report. She also expressed her thanks to those who had sent their remarks and comments on the draft versions circulated in the consortium on 4th and 6th May. All partners' remarks had been taken into account. As visible from the shared Financial Statement excel file, as of early May 2020 the total costs incurred in the consortium amount to 368476,80 EUR that is 73,72% of the first pre-financing processed to the consortium at project's initial phase. In line with the Grant Agreement's provisions, the consortium is entitled and will submit with the Progress Report a request for payment that refers to the second pre-financing amounting to 40% of the total approved grant. The 2nd pre-financing is subject to approval of the Progress Report. As mentioned earlier, the consortium plans to submit the Progress Report electronically to EACEA on 8th May 2020. Christina asked the partners present if they have any further comments or remarks to make prior to the submission based on the information in the recently shared draft versions of the files (Technical Report in pdf, Financial Statement in excel and Table of Achieved Results in word). Richel Lamadrid from SLU suggested that the posters drafted by P15 project team and used to promote the Intercultural Passport virtual module and the digital storytelling contests should be included in the report. Christina confirmed that this information will be added in sections 3.5. and 3.6. of the Table of Achieved Results as well as in the report sections concerning project dissemination and visibility. Christina asked if there are any further comments and recommendations for improvement and if the partners agree with the Progress Report's data, information and conclusions. All partners attending the webinar confirmed that they agree with Progress Report content and that the Progress Report could be submitted on behalf of the consortium on 8th May 2020. *Mike Meallem from PYU and Jigme Wangdi from RIM who were not able to attend the webinar confirmed subsequently their approval of the Progress Report via email.*

3. Upcoming project meetings

Partners agreed to hold the next consortium webinar on 10 June 2020, Wednesday at 10 am Brussels time. By that time, WP3 activities will be almost completed and partners will be able to finalize the Student Boot Camp plans. The next face-to-face partner meeting is planned to take place in Thailand during the week commencing 5th October 2020. Partners will discuss the programming of the meeting at the next webinar too.