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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)**

2nd WEBINAR
3rd May 2019

MINUTES

Venue: online session at gotomeeting.com

Attendees: FRIENDS Steering Committee members as well as other project partners

1. WP1 update and activities completion

The project coordinator Christina Armutlieva welcomed to the 2nd project webinar the Steering Committee members as well all other project partners who were able to join the online meeting. For starters, Christina provided an overview of the progress made by the consortium in WP1. In fact, as of 30th April 2019 11 out of the 12 Partner Country HEIs (PC HEIs) had submitted their IaH self-evaluation reports by using the questionnaire tool designed and endorsed by the 4 Programme County HEIs. The PSU representatives confirmed that they will submit their missing IaH self-evaluation report by the end of the current week. Furthermore, Christina briefed the partners on the infographic report template design. It is created by Dr Sheryl Satorre from UC and reflects the project logo and design. The 12 infographic reports summarizing the data collected and collated at each of the 12 PC HEIs will apply the same template to ensure consistency in project branding and messages. Sheryl had been also the leading force in designing the project logo that had been earlier circulated in the consortium. It reflects such key FRIENDS messages as unity, diversity, cooperation and mutual understanding. The project website had been also designed by the subcontracted external company in line with the logo branding and key messages. The project website will go public before the end of the month. All project partners had already provided the requested institutional data to be placed on the website.

2. Partnership Agreements and advance payments

As of 2nd May 2019, all project partners but PSU had sent through to VUM soft copies of the signed project's Partnership Agreement and Annexes. The partners from PSU present at the Steering Committee meeting confirmed that they will provide the Partnership Agreement signed by their legal representative before the end of the current week. In the meantime, VUM is processing the first advance payments as agreed in the Partnership Agreement. As of 2nd May 2019, 8 out of the 15 due first advance payments had been processed. Christina confirmed that all outstanding first advance payments will be made no later than 15 days following the signing of each Partnership Agreement. The first advance payment represents 15% of the total grant allocated and approved to each project partners HEI.

3. 2nd FRIENDS project meeting agenda

The planned 4-day meeting programme recently circulated in the consortium reflects the commitments made in the application form and includes a 2-day staff training entitled European Higher Education in the World. The training is planned to be delivered by the 4 Programme Country HEIs and is targeted at representatives of the 12 PC HEIs. Having said this, Christina outlined that the trainings aiming to promote good internationalisation practices applied at European HEIs are in fact meant to be delivered in a highly interactive fashion and shall turn into a two-way learning exercise benefitting both sides. To increase efficiency and ensure high level of engagement, the trainees will split into 2 smaller groups and the trainers will deliver the same content to each of 2 groups. The training will be kick-started by a plenary session where VUM will provide a general overview of the political background, policies and programmes in place in the EU to support HE internationalisation. Ayse Deniz Ozkan from IAU to host the 2nd FRIENDS meeting informed the partners that she is working on inviting a representative of the Turkish National Erasmus+ Agency to the training who would brief the FRIENDS partners on the Erasmus+ programme's future development plans after 2020. Ayse should be able to confirm the participation of a representative of the Turkish National Erasmus+ Agency to the FRIENDS meeting before the end of the month. During the remaining 2 days in Istanbul, project partners will engage in workshops on project financial management and equipment purchasing tenders. Furthermore, they will participate in quality and project dissemination panels and working sessions. Mike Meallem from PYU in charge of project dissemination confirmed that PYU project team is currently preparing for the Swags Design Contest and the consortium will finalize and announce it by the time of FRIENDS meeting in Istanbul at the latest.

4. 2nd FRIENDS project meeting practicalities

Ayse and Faruk from IAU briefed the partners on the progress made with the visa invitations provision so far. They encouraged all partners who need a visa invitation to Turkey that had not sent yet their passport copies to IAU to do so asap as time is really tight. Christina reminded the partners of the visa issuance time-consuming nature and outlined that visa delays are not considered force majeure in the Erasmus+ CBHE programme. Furthermore, each partner HEI is expected to be represented by 2 staff members at the meeting in Istanbul. Ayse and Faruk stressed how important it is that all participants to the meeting book their accommodation in the vicinity of IAU premises. They confirmed that there are still rooms available in the initially recommended hotel Ramada Encore Istanbul Airport. Partners could choose a less expensive accommodation options as well as long as these are within walking distance from IAU campus that is the meeting venue. In terms of the meals organization, Ayse suggested to proceed as in KL in March 2019. As a meeting host, IAU will arrange in advance the lunches and coffee breaks during the 4 meeting days and will also organize a welcome and farewell consortium dinners. Individual costs to incur in regard with these preliminary meal arrangements are to be covered by the partners who will pay directly to IAU at the time of the meeting.

5. Equipment and VAT issues

Christina briefed the partners on the information collected and collated by VUM concerning the upcoming equipment purchasing tenders in the 5 PCs. Apparently, 8 of the 12 PC HEIs had requested a change in their pre-approved equipment lists. These changes concern either equipment specs and quality and/or the quantity of the equipment items to be purchased and are therefore subject to specific prior authorization from EACEA. In 4 of the 5 PCs involved in FRIENDS, the partners had confirmed that they will be able to purchase the project equipment on national level by organizing one single tender to purchase the equipment in bulk for all PC HEIs from this particular country. Only in Thailand, each of the 3 PC HEIs included will need to purchase its equipment separately at institutional level due to the national legislation in place that prevents the 3 PC HEIs from purchasing the equipment in the framework of one single tender organized at national level. Due to the amount of the 3 contracts in Thailand that cannot exceed 11000 EUR excluding VAT at institutional level, the 3 PC HEIs in Thailand will not need to organize a tender. Nevertheless, they will be required to collect 3 offers and to buy the equipment that meets best the best-value-for-money criterion. The amount of the 4 equipment purchasing contracts in the other 4 PCs is to be defined based on the VAT rates in place. Christina requested the partners in Bhutan, Cambodia and Malaysia to conduct further research and consultations on the relevant and applicable VAT rates in these 3 PCs and to inform the project coordinating institution on this at the time of FRIENDS meeting in Istanbul at the latest. Christina outlined the importance of finalizing the project equipment purchase in all 5 FRIENDS PCs by the end of the first project year at the latest.