

# Erasmus+ programme as factor of academic leadership for Russian HEIs: a case of RUDN University

**Andrey Kinyakin**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Peoples` Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)  
Miklukho-Maklaya str. 10/2, 117198 Moscow  
Russian Federation  
e-mail: [akteon79@gmail.com](mailto:akteon79@gmail.com)

**Mario De Martino**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Peoples` Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)  
Miklukho-Maklaya str. 10/2, 117198 Moscow  
Russian Federation  
e-mail: [mario.demartino@gmail.com](mailto:mario.demartino@gmail.com)

**Abstract** The enhancement of academic leadership through development of internationalization is one the prime goals of higher education institutions (HEIs) all over the world. For that purpose, they use not only traditional tools, based on "export of education" or development of cooperation with institutions in other countries/regions but also the new ones, envisaging the involvement of the "third parties". One of such mechanisms is European Union (EU) Erasmus+ program, which is to some extent EU "soft power" tool, aimed at promotion of the European best practices by supporting educational and scientific activity both in the EU and non-EU countries. In the recent years, Erasmus+ programme got extremely popular among HEIs within the post-soviet space. Especially among Russian universities, striving to get involved into different projects within Erasmus+ programme - International Credit Mobility (ICM), Jean Monnet Activities (JMA) and Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education (CBHE), which contribute to enhancement of internationalization. One of the best practices of involvement of Russian HEIs into Erasmus+ programme is the activity of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). Starting to develop the Erasmus+ projects from 2013 with one JMA-project by now the institution can boast more than 300 facilitated ICMs, six JMA-projects and two CBHE-projects. The ambitious mid-term strategy of RUDN University aimed at not only multiplying the number of projects, but also taking cooperation within Erasmus+ programme to the higher level by establishing Erasmus+ Centre of Excellence. It enables not only to get the new opportunities for internationalization but to enhance its reputation as an internationally oriented institution, getting higher positions in the academic ratings and promoting the leadership function among not only Russian but also international HEIs.

## 1 Introduction

Academic leadership is one the prime goal, which is pursued by higher education institutions (HEI) all over the world. It provides certain benefits for the HEI, contributing to development of academic reputation and enhancing competitiveness. Not surprisingly, many higher education institutions strive to obtain the status of academic leaders upgrading themselves in different ways.

Among the basic- modernization of educational system, enhancement of academic quality, development of scientific and research activity and internationalization (Jibeen and Asad Khan 2015; Morosini et al 2017). The latter currently plays a significant role as not only a tool of transformation of the HEIs into a modern type of educational and scientific institutions but also provides evident advantages in pursuing academic leadership on national, regional and international level (Qiang 2003).

With regard to the above, development of internationalization, envisaging increasing the number of international partners, fostering student and teaching mobility, building up international scientific and research projects turns out to be extremely important.

The evidence is the embeddedness of internationalization in the long-term strategies and development policies of many HEIs as one of the main directions of expansion.

Especially it is valid for the institutions from the so-called post-Soviet states, which given long-lasting experience of staying out of the global higher education system and rather outdated character of national higher education systems need certain incentives for modernization, which provide not only new knowledge, skills

and competences but also help to fill the development gap with the Western institutions and remain competitive.

In this sense of the utmost interest are the Russian HEIs, which traditionally spearhead the modernization activities in higher education within post-Soviet space, once pioneering in adopting Bologna system and at the moment try to remain the role of the regional academic leaders.

Russian higher education institutions are striving to get more internationalized globally by using different forms and mechanisms. One of the most popular in the recent years became the EU Erasmus+ programme, which not only provides extraordinary opportunities for internationalization for the Russian HEIs but also is the reliable source of financing of educational and research activities.

## **2 Erasmus+ programme as a tool of enhancement of higher educational institution internationalization**

Erasmus+ programme was launched by the regulation No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 (European Union 2013) and, in line with the EU multiannual financial period 2014-2020, lasts for 7 years. Such programme is the main tool of the European Union in the fields of education, training, youth and sport and it contributes in achieving the goals the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion set by the EU in 2010 (European Commission 2010). The strategy of growth Europe 2020 was developed when the European Union was hit by the financial and economic crisis of 2008, which has been defined in official documents of the EU and by analysts the most severe since the European integration process started in the 50s (Della Posta and Talani 2011; Eurobarometer 2013). The youth population is one of the most affected section of the European society by the crisis (European Parliament, 2011) and this is confirmed by some statistics, such as the 23.7% unemployment rate in 2013 at EU level reaching some peaks in Greece (57.3%), Spain (56.5%) and Croatia (52.8%) in 2013 (European Commission 2016; Eurostat 2013). The consequences of the economic and financial crisis resulted in a shirking of Europe's share of global GDP, which reduced from 26% before the crisis in 2004 to 22% in 2015 (European Commission 2017a).

If from one side, the Erasmus+ programme represents a tool to tackle the internal challenges that the EU is facing at economic and societal level above mentioned, from the other side such programme is a key tool to foster the process of establishing a European Higher Education Area, started in 1998 with the Sorbonne Declaration and known as the Bologna process. Since its inception, the Bologna process has both an internal and external dimension, as demonstrated by the statement that one of its key objectives is to "increase the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education" (European Ministers of Education, 1999). While the internal dimension of the Bologna process is mostly focused in creating a European Higher Education Area, facilitating the recognition of qualifications and of the period of study in another European country, the external dimension aims at enhancing the quality and reputation of the higher education systems of European countries and making them more attractive for students and scholars of other regions of the world.

The external dimension of the European Union educational policy in the Erasmus+ programme is represented by all those actions of the programme, which are oriented to foster the cooperation between European and third countries universities in the field of higher education, such as Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility, Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Jean Monnet Activities (European Commission 2019).

The cooperation through such actions of the Erasmus+ programme can be of different typologies. For instance, Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility fosters the collaboration between European and third countries universities through short term academic mobility (from three to twelve months for students and from one week to three months for university staff). Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education is an action of the Erasmus+ programme, which supports the accessibility, internationalization and modernization of higher education of least developed countries through transnational projects composed by consortia of European and non-European universities. In such action of the Erasmus+ programme, a special focus is given to higher education institutions in more remote areas and to student with special needs or to those students in disadvantaged conditions living in low socio-economic backgrounds. Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degrees is an action of the Erasmus+ programme aiming at establishing joint master programmes of European universities, in which universities of third countries can participate as members. In such joint master programmes, non-EU citizens can obtain Erasmus Mundus grants through a selection process that should be carried out by each consortia of universities before the beginning of the academic year. Jean Monnet Activities supports projects aiming at enhancing study and research on the European integration process. The actions of the Jean Monnet activities can be of different typologies. For instance, they can be focused on teaching activities (Jean Monnet Modules and Jean Monnet Actions), in which teaching programmes on European studies should be delivered by one lecturer or by a group of lecturers in a higher education institution. Another typology of Jean Monnet action comprises all those projects mostly focused on enhancing the dialogue

between academia and social society on European integration matters (Jean Monnet Projects) and in some cases creating a network of organizations analysing such topics at multinational level (Jean Monnet Networks).

From the short overview of the types of actions of the Erasmus+ programme fostering the cooperation with third countries it is possible to identify two main functions of the external dimension of such programme: 1) enhance attractiveness and competitiveness of the EU higher education system; 2) provide technical assistance to third countries.

The first function responds to the challenge of “brain race”, as it has been defined by the renowned scholar of the field of internationalization of higher education Jane Knight (2013), which indicates the current trend of universities of attracting the brightest students and scholar to study and work in their institutions. The European universities compete in the higher education market and some of the main challenges are the international rankings and the number of international students. In terms of international rankings, despite their long history and prestigious academic traditions, European universities are suffering the tough competition of universities from other regions of the world (Erkkilä 2013). Regarding international students, looking at the UNESCO statistics on incoming international students, all EU countries (including United Kingdom) represents the region of the world with the highest number of incoming international students (UNESCO 2018). However, in the last few years the accelerating trend is that European countries are suffering the competition in the global student market of other countries such as Australia, China, Canada and Russia (Marginson 2018).

Development assistance to education is another typology of engagement of the European Union in the field of education. Often education is interlinked with other interests, such as the establishment of stable and democratic systems or sound economies in partner countries. For instance, this is a rationale that explained the great support in terms of technical assistance programmes of the European Union to former socialist countries in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union to facilitate the transition to market economies and multiparty democracies (Takala and Piattoeva 2012). In general terms, both the enhancement of attractiveness and competitiveness of the EU higher education system and the promotion of technical assistance to third countries are forms of soft power that the European Union develops to improve its image internationally.

### **3 Development of Erasmus+ programme in Russia: forms and tools**

The main actions of the Erasmus+ programme open to Russian participants (universities and individuals) are International Credit Mobility (KA107), Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (KA1), Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education (KA2) and Jean Monnet Activities. From the point of view of the budget, under the Erasmus+ programme, all the regions of the world are classified in geographical and, in some cases, in economic income groups. The Russian Federation is classified as separate region (Region 4) with a budget that it is not shared with other countries of the world, which is approximately 10% of the total amount of the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (European Commission 2017b) and 4% for Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education (European Commission 2018). In Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Jean Monnet Activities there is not allocation of budget for regions. With a budget of 12 million of Euro, the number of mobilities between Russia and Europe in the framework of Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) is of around 3500 units every year. According to the statistics of the European Commission (2018), from 2015 to 2017 the mobilities implemented in Erasmus+ ICM is the following:

**Table 1.** Mobilities to/from Russian Federation awarded under call 2015, 2016 and 2017

	<b>Call 2015</b>	<b>Call 2016</b>	<b>Call 2017</b>
<b>Incoming (to EU)</b>	1916	2187	2264
<b>Outgoing (from EU)</b>	1238	1572	1677
<b>Total</b>	<b>3154</b>	<b>3759</b>	<b>3941</b>

Source: European Commission (2018)

The statistics show that the number of mobilities is growing and that the number of incoming mobility to Europe is higher than outgoing mobility. This trend is common to the majority of partner countries of the EU according to the European Commission statistics (2018).

With approximately 6 million of EUR per year, which represents 4% of the yearly budget, the European Commission supports Capacity Building projects of in the field of Higher education with Russian universities (2018). Since 1993, the Russian Federation participates in the Tempus programme (McCabe et al. 2011), the technical assistance programme designed to support the higher education systems of EU neighbouring countries that preceded Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education. In the Erasmus+ programme, Capacity

Building projects are open to all regions of the world and the participation of the Russian universities is summarized in the table underneath:

**Table 2.** Participation of Russian HEIs in Capacity Building in the field of higher education: number of projects submitted and selected

Year	Overall number of applications	No. of projects in which participate Russian HEIs	No. of projects selected in which participate Russian HEIs
2018	887	103	10
2017	833	108	11
2016	736	78	16
2015	515	57	13

Source: EACEA library (YEAR)

According to EACEA statistics, since 2015 the participation of Russian universities in Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education is one of the highest compared with other countries of the world. With 91 applications in 2015, 130 applications in 2016, 130 in 2017 and 109 in 2018, Ukraine is the only non-EU country that submitted more applications than Russia every year (EACEA 2019a).

In the last few years, Jean Monnet Activities is the action of the Erasmus+ programme, which measured an impressive increase of applications from Russian universities and since 2016 Russia is the country of the world with the highest number of projects submitted yearly. Table 3 shows the progress of participation of Russian universities in the Jean Monnet actions since 2015 and compares it with Italy and Ukraine, the two countries that with Russia had the highest number of applications.

**Table 3.** Participation of Russian HEIs in Jean Monnet Actions and comparison with Italy and Ukraine

Country	Number of applications submitted per year			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Russia	78	195	228	260
Italy	120	126	119	125
Ukraine	110	124	149	165

Source: European Commission (YEAR), Erasmus+ (YEAR)

One of the reasons explaining the impressive rise of number of applications for Russian universities in Jean Monnet Activities is the additional funds allocated by the European Commission through the EU Partnership Instrument (PI), a part of the European Union budget aimed at strengthening the collaboration with third countries. The Russian Federation, together with other non-EU countries has been included among the beneficiaries of extra funds of 3,5 million EUR for the calls 2015 – EAC/A04/2014 and 2018 – EAC/A05/2017 and of 3 million EUR for the call 2016 – EAC/A04/2015 (EACE 2019b). This enabled to rise enormously the number of projects selected for funding submitted Russian universities as indicates table 4.

**Table 4.** Progress of Nr of projects selected for funding submitted by Russian HEIs

	Year 2014	Year 2015	Year 2016	Year 2017	Year 2018
No of projects selected	2	45	33	12	23

Source: European Commission (2018) Country factsheet: Russia, Erasmus+ for higher education in Russia

#### **4 Specifics of Erasmus+ programme projects within the RUDN University**

RUDN University has been involved in Erasmus+ programme since 2015, when it started implementing 8 International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects and when it was selected one Jean Monnet project. The ICM projects were carried out with 8 European universities from 5 EU countries (Portugal, Spain, Poland, Greece and Cyprus) and the activities were opened to all types of mobility (student, teaching and administrative staff). Regarding the engagement in Jean Monnet Actions in 2015, the Jean Monnet Project entitled European traditions in Russian Education system: foundation for talent mobility “ETRMO” (project reference number 565672-EPP-1-2015-1-RU-EPPJMO-PROJECT) is an interdisciplinary project implemented at RUDN faculty of Economics, with the active participation of academic staff of the department of international relations (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences). Such project, through the organization of eight dissemination

events involving the participation of academia and civil society, aims at supporting wide understanding and reflection of European social, business and cultural environment among Russian academic staff at universities (ETRM0 2019).

The engagement of RUDN University in European funded projects Erasmus+ has increased during the years and some important achievements were:

- 1) Rise from 8 to 38 International Credit Mobility projects in the academic year 2016/17, one year after that RUDN University started its participation in the Erasmus+ programme;
- 2) In 2016, it was selected Enhancement of Higher Education and Corporate Sectors Integration in Accordance with New Social Environment “ENINEDUCOR”, the first Capacity Building in the field of higher education project (project reference number 574060-EPP-1-2016-KZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP);
- 3) In 2016, two projects were selected in the call EAC/A04/2015 in the framework of Jean Monnet Activities. The projects selected are: Jean Monnet Module “Transformation of social and political values: the EU practice” (Project No 575361 - EPP -1- 2016 -1- RU-EPPJMO – ERASMUS\_MODULE) and Jean Monnet Project “European traditions in governance, design and environmental management of megacities: search for solutions” (Project No 2016-2612/574863-EPP-1-2016-1-RU-EPPJMO-PROJECT);
- 4) In 2017, according to the statistics provided by the European Commission (C3 International Cooperation, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture), RUDN university was ranked as 4<sup>th</sup> Russian university in number of students and staff mobility in the framework of Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects, after Higher School of Economics, Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University.

The increase of participation of RUDN University in Erasmus+ project is summarized in Table

**Table 5.** Erasmus+ projects at RUDN University (division per year and action)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
International Credit Mobility (ICM)	8	38	113	258	415
Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education (CBHE)	0	1	1	0	2
Jean Monnet Activities	1	2	0	0	3

Source: RUDN University, own results

The statistics on the implementation of the Erasmus+ projects at RUDN University show that there is an active engagement of the university in the Erasmus+ programme. In terms of number of projects, the most positive results have been achieved in International Credit Mobility (ICM), as demonstrated by the fact that RUDN University is one of the universities with the highest number of mobilities at Russian level. While in ICM the participation of the university embraces practically all the subject areas existing RUDN university, in Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education and Jean Monnet Activities the participation is limited to some faculties and institutes of RUDN University. In Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education the 2 projects are implemented at the faculty of Economics and at the Agrarian and Technological Institute. Regarding Jean Monnet Activities, the projects are implemented at the faculties of Economics and Humanities and Social Sciences and at the Agrarian and Technological Institute.

## **5 The practical experience of development of Erasmus+ programme: a case-study of the TSPV-module**

The specifics of implementation of the Erasmus+ programme projects within RUDN University can be better disclosed by taking into consideration certain cases. One of the most prominent is the educational module "Transformation of social and political values: the EU practice" (TSPV 2015), which is from 2016 carried out within Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the RUDN University.

The TSPV-module, which turns out to be one of the projects within Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Activities was initiated in September 2016 after the application for the creation, submitted in the beginning of 2016, was approved by the European Education, Audio visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) among 30 others Russian JMA-projects (out of more than 170 applications submitted) and contract for the implementation was signed with the RUDN University opening the way for allocation of initial financing. According to the rules of the EACEA, the development of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Activities is facilitated on the basis of co-financing

mechanism. The EU provides 2/3 of necessary financing, whereas Russian HEI provides 1/3. The initial European contribution is of 70% of overall allocated financing, the rest 30% is to be provided after submission of final report in third year of implementation of the module.

The module, envisaging teaching activity on European studies in English in bulk of 80 teaching hours a year (240 teaching hours within the 3-year period of implementation of the module), comprises five teaching disciplines:

- Governance models in the EU: levels, forms and mechanisms;
- Political culture and mechanism of political values formation in the EU;
- “Pitfalls” of European integration: political, economic, social and cultural dimensions;
- European migration policy and the problem of pan-European identity formation;
- Soft power as European integration policy tool: forms and mechanisms.

Given the specifics of the TSPV-module, which despite its multidisciplinary character, has special focus on political science issues (EU institutions, political culture), all the disciplines were elaborated by the professors and lecturers of the Department of Comparative Politics of the RUDN University, who became the core of the TSPV-module team (TSPV 2015). Extremely important was, that besides relevant content, concerning different aspects of functioning of the European Union, the disciplines envisaged new methods of learning (problem-oriented teaching) as well as active use of multimedia and digital tools.

Although initially the core/target group for the TSPV-module were students in minor courses (1-3 year of studying) of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the RUDN University with advanced level of English, further development proved, that among the students were lots of students from other specializations as well as young professionals, taking interest in European studies and having elementary (basic) knowledge in English. However, the practical experience proved, the majority of students of the TSPV-module are those of social sciences - political science, international relations, public administration, history, sociology and economics.

Within the period 2016-2017 the overall number of students, who were taught within the TSPV-module totalled 60 persons. It is worth mentioning, that during this period the partaking within the TSPV-module was only voluntary and the students did not get additional credit points. From 2018, the disciplines of the TSPV-module were embedded into the study plans of different specializations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the RUDN University, what enabled the increase of the number of students, which by the beginning of winter semester 2018/2019 exceeded 120 persons.

Moreover, besides the students of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the classes within the TSPV-module attended the students from other facilities of the RUDN University as well as young professionals. For the latter the TSPV-team launched in 2018 the special professional education program - "Social economic and social political projection: the EU practice", aiming to present the current practices of project management in the EU (TSPV 2015).

The increase of the number of new students within the TSPV-module was also stipulated by the functioning of the system of external communications, which was elaborated from the very start of the implementation of the module. It encompasses not only the open education resource (OER) - the official website of the module - [www.tspv-erasmus.ru](http://www.tspv-erasmus.ru), but also the official accounts of the module in different social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). All these resources play the two-fold role - storage of information and dissemination of the results (also serving as advertising tools, attracting new students).

In this respect, the crucial role plays the web-site of the TSPV-module as well as Facebook and YouTube accounts, which contain the majority of information, covering the education module (presentations on disciplines, learning and didactic materials, video and multimedia) and implement the function of main dissemination vehicles (TSPV 2015).

The dissemination strategy of the TSPV-module comprised not only the use of traditional forms (preparation of publications in peer-reviewed journals as well as handbook) but also introducing innovative – generation of content for massive online-open course (MOOC) and making video lecturing.

One of the main directions of special direction of the dissemination strategy of the TSPV-module is the organization of scientific and special events, which is also helpful for research activity.

The latter envisages development of the research projects within the topic of the module apart from organizing the scientific events, which serve mainly to the goals dissemination of the results of the projects.

One of the main research activities became the multidisciplinary project aimed at assessment/measuring the perception and attitude of young Russian towards the European Union and European values. Using of specially elaborated research methodology, based on methods of sociology, political and cultural sciences, the TSPV-module team managed to interview more than 300 respondents (mainly students of the Moscow HEIs) within 2016-2019, finding out the dynamics of the attitude of young Russians towards the EU and axiological similarities and discrepancies between Russia and Europe. The results of this research project are to find

embodiment in the publications by the members of the TSPV-module team (also serving the purpose of dissemination).

The important part of the research activity as well as implementation of the module as a whole is organization of different scientific events, which enabled not only to show the results, therefore making the process of dissemination easier, but also to develop networking with other HEIs not only in Moscow and Russia, but also in European and non-European countries.

Among the most significant events, which were organized within the period of implementation of the TSPV-module, are several round-table discussions, devoted to the different axiological aspects (2017-2019), workshop on dynamics of European political cultures in 2018 as well as international conference on EU-Russia relationships (2017).

The minor events comprise the special seminars, masterclasses on the topic of European studies with special emphasis on the axiological aspects of functioning of the European Union.

Among the events, which were not directly bound to the topic of the TSPV-module but played significant role in the dissemination of the project, are the so-called "special purpose events". One of the majors is multiform event (combination of two lectures, master-class, panel discussion and presentations) #EuropeDayRUDN, which was taking place in 2017-2018 and which major purpose was to make the students of the RUDN University as well as other Russian HEIs aware about the essence of the European Union, its institutional, organizational and functional framework. The #EuropeDayRUDN, which anticipated the partaking of the representatives of the RUDN University Erasmus+ partner institutions from Europe, also contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about the EU Erasmus+ programme.

## **6 Perspectives of development of Erasmus+ programme within the RUDN University**

The development of the TSPV-project as well as other Erasmus+ projects is one of the key elements of the internationalization strategy of the RUDN University, which is institutionalized on the basis of the road map within the framework of the "5-100" Russian academic excellence project, carried out from 2013 (RUDN University is a member of this project from 2016).

This road map envisages two phases of internationalization – preliminary (2016-2018) and basic (2018-2020). The preliminary phase supposed the development of internationalization by stepping up cooperation with the certain institutions in the core regions (Europe, Asia) and countries, increase of the percentage of the foreign students, enhancement of incoming student and teaching mobility as well as attracting of the teaching staff abroad (RUDN 2015).

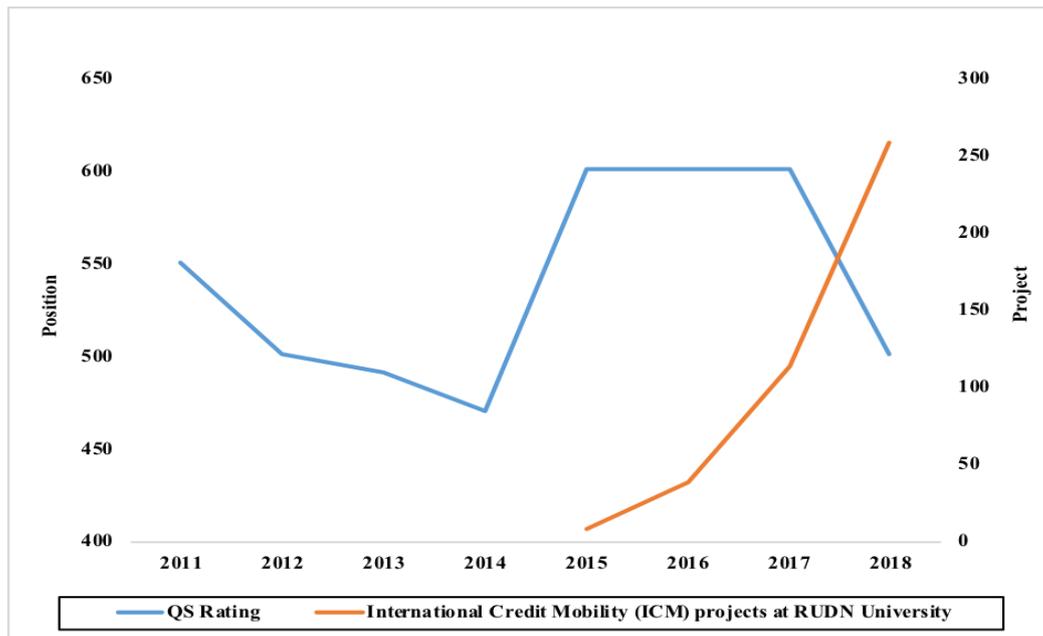
The activity within Erasmus+ programme is embedded in the indicator "student mobility", and strongly connected with the International Credit Mobility (ICM) project. At the same time the road map envisages the active development of the cooperation with the foreign (first of all European) higher education institution in form of creating the joint educational and scientific projects. The most widespread form of cooperation in this respect is development of joint curriculum or double-degree program (most frequently master-degree program). This is one of the core element of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education (CBHE) projects, envisaging designing of international consortia for facilitation of bilateral or multilateral educational or scientific projects

The goal of development of cooperation with the foreign HEIs (especially Top-500) in designing the joint educational and scientific projects stayed one of the prime within the basic phase of the implementation of the road map of the RUDN University. But more importantly it put forward the aim of promoting the brand of the university outward, improving the positions in the world academic ratings (RUDN 2017).

First of all, in the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Rating, which at the moment is most well-known and respected gauge for assessment of academic reputation. According to the road map, the main aim is improvement of positions of the RUDN University in QS Rating by 2020 to the 300th place among world universities.

Although this aim looks like very ambitious from 2016 to 2018 the HEI improved its positions from 650 to 501, making in huge progress in internationalization. Whereas the maximal improvement was achieved within indicator "International students", which heavily corresponds with the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility project.

Moreover, it would not be exaggeration to state, that the fivefold surge of incoming and outgoing student mobility within 2015-2018 within the Erasmus+ ICM-project gravely contributed to the improvement of overall rating of the RUDN University QS World University Rating. At least these two variables heavily correspond to each other (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** The dynamics of the RUDN University positioning in the QS World University Rating and the number of International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects at the RUDN University  
*Source:* Own results

However, even without the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility project the involvement within the Erasmus+ programme proved to be very advantageous for RUDN University, allowing not only to enhance its reputation in Europe as one of the renown Russian higher education and scientific institution and create networking the European HEIs, but also to get practical experience in participation in the EU education program and implementation of EU projects. This experience showed not only the strong features (creativity), but also the problem zones (lack of capacity) of the university, giving a lot of useful information for further development itself as higher education institution. But more importantly it outlined the major goals for university further activity within Erasmus+ programme:

- 1) Further development of the existing projects within International Credit Mobility (ICM), Jean Monnet Activities (JMA) and Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education (CBHE) with the special emphasis on CBHE;
- 2) Multiplying the number of the new Erasmus+ projects on the basis of stepping up activity of submitting the applications within different subject areas;
- 3) Active enhancement of networking with the HEIs from the EU and non-EU countries for collaboration in development of joint educational and scientific projects;
- 4) Establishment within the RUDN University in the mid-term perspective the Erasmus+ Centre of Excellence - the highest grade of Erasmus+ programme, which promotes the cooperation as well as academic reputation to the qualitatively new level.

The achievement of all these goals contributes to improvement of the academic reputation, paving the way for obtaining academic leadership not only among the Russian HEIs but also world best universities, winning recognition as a global higher education centre.

## 7 Conclusions

The development of the European Erasmus+ programme, which can be regarded as one of the "soft power" tools of the EU, contributes to internationalization of the Russian higher education institutions. It provides not only opportunities to bridge cooperation with the HEIs from the EU and non-EU countries and get additional financing for educational and scientific activities but more vitally - creates incentives for modernization. It turns out to be extremely important for the Russian HEIs, which have to face the strong competition challenge in the global higher education system.

Moreover, the involvement into the Erasmus+ projects - International Credit Mobility (ICM), Jean Monnet Activities (JMA) and Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education (CBHE) can be not only the

source of the new knowledge, skills and competences but also the tool of enhancement of the academic reputation, which contributes to development of academic leadership.

The HEIs, which aspire to get this status, should intensify their efforts of getting more involved into the Erasmus+ programme, allocating the additional resources. If it is done, the future benefits will not only cover the costs, but also pave the way for further sustainable development of the institution, eventually promoting it to the academic leaders both inward and outward.

And the case of the RUDN University, which within rather short period of time became highly involved into the Erasmus+ programme, got lots of benefits and has the consistent plan of further involvement within Erasmus+ projects (establishing Erasmus+ Centre of Excellence) proves to be rather good practice.

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