Erasmus student or EU ambassador?

People-to-people contact in the European Neighbourhood policy: the cases of Georgia, Ukraine and Tunisia

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by Andrea Perilli

About the author

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This paper is based on the author's Master's thesis at the College of Europe supervised by Professor Wolfgang Wessels.

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Abstract

This paper investigates to what extent and why the key action 1 of the Erasmus+ programme, namely learning mobility of individuals, can be considered a soft power's instrument on European Neighbourhood countries. The core assumption is that due to people-to-people contact, Erasmus participants are most likely to become EU informal ambassadors, in the sense that they become carriers of EU soft power leading to changes in cultural and social perceptions.

However, what will the place of Erasmus+ be in the ongoing debate on international cultural relations' strategy? Erasmus+ can play a major role in this new strategy considering the huge growth of mobility flows between EU and ENP countries, since the new programme was launched. Moreover, EU institutions are looking for new strategic tools of public diplomacy. Have they realised that the external dimension of Erasmus+ lends itself to being one of these?

Therefore, the topic of this work is of high interest because it is closely related to the debate about both the means and the ends of the EU external policy.

For the sake of this research, three case studies, from different geographical regions neighbouring the EU, have been chosen: Tunisia, Ukraine and Georgia.

A comparison among these three countries will reveal under which conditions Erasmus+ can be considered a soft power's instrument. Hence, the identification of conditions applicable to all EU partner countries in order to evaluate whether the EU can spread its soft power through Erasmus+, represent the thesis's added value which opens new avenues for further research on the topic.

Introduction

This year the Erasmus Programme is celebrating its 30th anniversary. This programme has become more challenging at every step. In fact, since 2014 Erasmus+ has been available for countries participating at the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The rationale behind this political choice is that the involvement of ENP countries in EU programmes is a means to promote reform and innovation in the EU's neighbourhood. Also, it is a means to support administrative and regulatory convergence of partner countries with the EU. Therefore, the causal explanation is that the EU is aware of the importance of higher education (HE) as a tool of soft power.[1]

The Erasmus programme, through the so-called 'Erasmus effect',[2] has significantly contributed to EU member states' socialisation over thirty years. Hence, the main assumption is that it could have the same effect on ENP countries. The ENP countries are the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan plus the ten southern Mediterranean countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Israel.

However, the study does not aim to give a comprehensive assessment of the whole Erasmus+ Programme on all ENP countries. The objective is to analyse the impact of the Erasmus+ key action 1 (i.e. learning mobility of individuals) and of the former programme Erasmus Mundus on the countries of Tunisia, Ukraine and Georgia. The main research question is why and to what extent the Erasmus+ Programme is an instrument of EU soft power on European neighbourhood countries. The aim is to measure the impact of the EU's mobility programmes towards cultural and geographical

[1] E. M. Botonero, 'EU Higher Education as Soft Power in Neighbouring Countries: A Projection of Influence by Compelling Means', ECPR General Conference Sciences Po Bordeaux, 2013, pp. 1-28.

[2] See for example: E. Sigalas, Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the ERASMUS year abroad, European Union Politics 11(2), 2010; Mitchell, Rethinking the 'Erasmus Effect' on European Identity, JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies v53 n2, 2015, pp. 330-348.

different ENP countries. The hypothesis of the study is that, due to socialisation through people-to-people (P2P) contact, Erasmus participants are most likely to become EU informal ambassadors. In fact, they become carriers of EU soft power in ENP countries leading to changes in cultural and social perception. However, the differences among the three case studies reveal under which conditions Erasmus+ can be considered a tool of EU soft power.

With respect to the structure of this paper, section 1 will emphasise the theoretical and methodological framework of the research and the research design concerning the surveys that have been conducted. Section 2 will describe the contextual background from the origin of the Erasmus programme to the current Erasmus+, as well as the brain drain/circulation phenomena. Section 3 will assess the EU HE cooperation programmes towards Ukraine, Tunisia and Georgia and present the surveys' outcomes. Section 4 will analyse the potential and limits of Erasmus+ and will attempt to theorise the external dimension of the programme. Finally, the conclusion will present final considerations and provide policy recommendations for both the Erasmus+ and ENI regulations' mid-term review and the upcoming Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027, as well as the EU strategy for international cultural relations.

1.Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The concept of **soft power** was introduced by Joseph Nye as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion.[3] This concept has been sometimes associated with the idea of **public diplomacy (PD)**. The latter can be defined as "how a nation's government or society engages with external audiences in ways that improve these foreign publics' perception of that nation"[4]. It is important to highlight at this stage that the European External Action Service (EEAS) is looking to differentiate the new narrative of EU PD from the concept of soft power as conceptualised by Nye.

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[3] J. Nye, Soft power: the means to success in world politics, New York: Public Affairs, 2004;

[4] M. K. Cross, Conceptualizing European public diplomacy, Palgrave, 2013, cited in H. Zichner et all., *European Neighbourhood Policy: Geopolitics Between Integration and Security,* 2016, p. 166.

In fact, in future, the EU may wish to move away from a unilateral understanding of soft power as theorised by Nye, preferring a new approach based on the exchanges of points of views or mutual attraction.

The concept of **social and cultural perception** refers to what people think about the EU from both a cultural and a social point of view, while the idea of **P2P contact** refers to mobility between both EU and ENP nationals and ENP nationals themselves. As far as this work is concerned, Erasmus activities are considered P2P contacts.

The **Erasmus effect** is the impact that the Erasmus experience has on participants and their countries. For the purposes of this study, **Erasmus participants** are all ENP nationals that are or have been studying/training in a EU country through an EU mobility programme. Also, EU citizens who participated in one of these programmes in an ENP country are considered Erasmus participants.

1.1 The EU Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

According to Nye, the soft power of a country can be enhanced by increasing international student and cultural exchange programmes. Based on Nye's concept, many scholars have highlighted the reliance of the EU on soft power tools to influence international affairs.[5] Even though some authors have already written about the soft power of education,[6] there has been little research concerning the role of EU's educational policies as a source of soft power in ENP countries. Nonetheless, Zichner and Saran have written about the power of attraction of the EU's education policy abroad, and they state that "it represents a resource for creating 'soft power'; this is important to convince people of the attractiveness of a political offer".[7]

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[5] See for example: T. Casey, Of Power and Plenty? Europe, Soft Power, and Genteel Stagnation, Comparative European Politics, 4(4), 2006, pp. 399-422; P. Colson, Soft Power Discourse and the Significance of European Union Foreign Policy Methods in L. Finn ed., The EU as a Foreign and Security Policy Actor, European Union Centre of Excellence, Nova Scotia, 2009.

[6] See for example: W.Y.W. Lo, Soft power, university rankings and knowledge production: distinction between hegemony and self-determination in higher education, Comparative Education, 47(2), 2011, pp. 209-222; J. Nye, Soft Power and Higher Education, Harvard University, 2005; W. Jones, European Union Soft Power: Cultural Diplomacy & Higher Education in Southeast Asia, Silpakorn University International Journal, 9-10, 2010, pp. 41-70.

[7] H. Zichner and V. Saran, The EU's Education Policy Abroad: The 'Power of Attraction' and the Case of Moldova in Bruns et all., European Neighbourhood Policy: Geopolitics Between Integration and Security, 2016, p. 163.

Moreover, one of the priorities of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) launched in June 2016 is enhancing EU PD as a new narrative for the EU foreign policy. Before analysing it, one should try to answer the question of what PD means for the EU institutions. It means building trust and understanding in non-EU countries according to the following definition adopted by the EEAS:

> Public diplomacy refers to the process whereby a country seeks to build trust and understanding by engaging with a broader foreign public beyond the governmental relations that, customarily, have been the focus of diplomatic effort.[8]

Cull distinguishes five elements of PD: 'listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting'.[9] This work will dwell on three of these elements: cultural diplomacy, advocacy and exchange diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad".[10] As will be shown later in this paper, Cull's definition fits quite well the aim of the key action two and Jean Monnet activities of the Erasmus+ programme. However, the term of cultural diplomacy "is increasingly used as a synonym for international cultural relations".[11]

For Cull, "exchange diplomacy is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation".[12] In his analysis, Cull observes that past experiences, for example the Franco-German rapprochement after WW2, are based on the element of reciprocity in which both parties benefit. However, Cull also highlights that exchange diplomacy could be conceptualised as a one-way process, according to which "my students will go overseas and tell you how wonderful my country is; your students will come here and learn how wonderful my country is".[13]

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[8] European Parliament Preparatory Action, Culture in European External Relations, 2014, p. 136.
[9] N.J.Cull, *Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories*, ANNALS, AAPSS, 616, March 2008, p. 32.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[11] Culture in European External Relations, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[12] N.J.Cull, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[13] N.J.Cull, *loc. cit.*

1.2 Methodological Framework and research design

It is not easy to find relevant data for ENP Erasmus participants; the main existing findings stress on the economic and employability benefit of the programme, but they provide little evidence on the social and cultural impact. Conducting surveys, therefore, was necessary. Survey data from students participating in mobility exchanges (to and from ENP countries) were collected to have some preliminary insights. In addition, quantitative data analysis was based on complementary data sources from the European Commission's and UNESCO's websites.

Erasmus participants were recruited via Erasmus+ national offices, which agreed to forward standardised emails and post the surveys on their websites. However, the Erasmus participants included were primarily ENP alumni and students of the College of Europe, as the ENP scholarships were granted at the beginning by the European Commission under the Jean Monnet programme that is now part of Erasmus+. From one perspective, this could be regarded as a limitation of the surveys conducted, since someone might argue that these individuals are more likely to have been attached to the EU. However, it is also possible to argue that the individuals surveyed were the most suitable for the aim of this paper, as they are expected to be the most aware of the EU functions and processes and are, thus, in a better position to provide reliable replies which could lead to insightful results.

The outcomes of the first general survey were by and large as expected, and the replies were used to test them with more precise questions in the second one. Moreover, as the questions used in the second survey come from the Eurobarometer, it was possible to conduct a comparative analysis between the results. For instance, it was possible to check whether EU values according to Ukrainian respondents (my survey) are the same according to EU citizens (Eurobarometer survey).

2. Contextual background and Erasmus+ international dimension's budget

The external dimension of the Erasmus+ programme derives especially from the heritage of Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. The latter was launched in 2004 and had three actions. The first one called Erasmus Mundus Joint Programme (EMJP), the second Erasmus Mundus Partnership (EMP) and the third, promotion projects. Figure 1 gives an idea of the umbrella characteristic that put an end to the fragmentation of the extra-EU programmes merging them with intra-EU programmes.

Figure 1: From Erasmus to Erasmus+
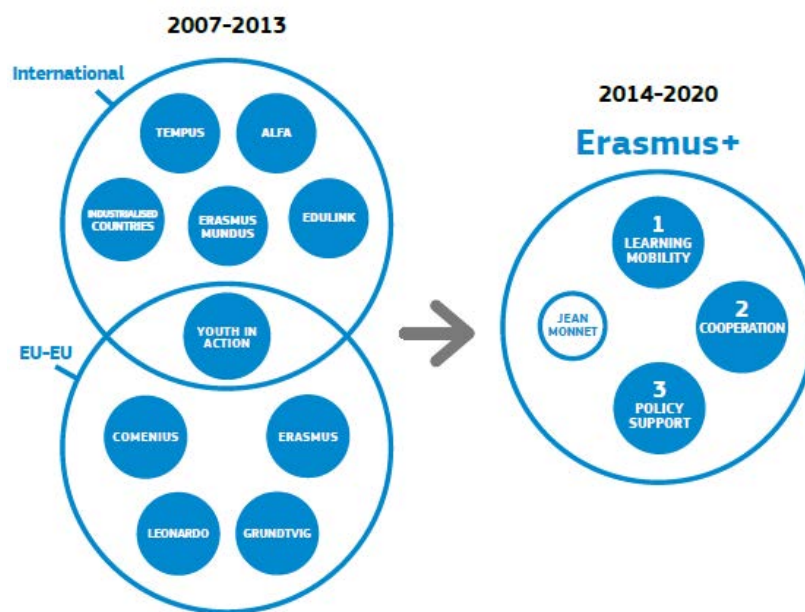
Source: European Commission[14]

Concerning the current Erasmus+ international dimension's budget, it is important to highlight that the most part of it is dedicated to the European neighbours. In fact, these funds come from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and reflect the EU foreign policy's priorities.

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[14] European Commission, Work together with European higher education institutions, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, p. 7.

Figure 2: Budget allocated for the international dimension of Erasmus+
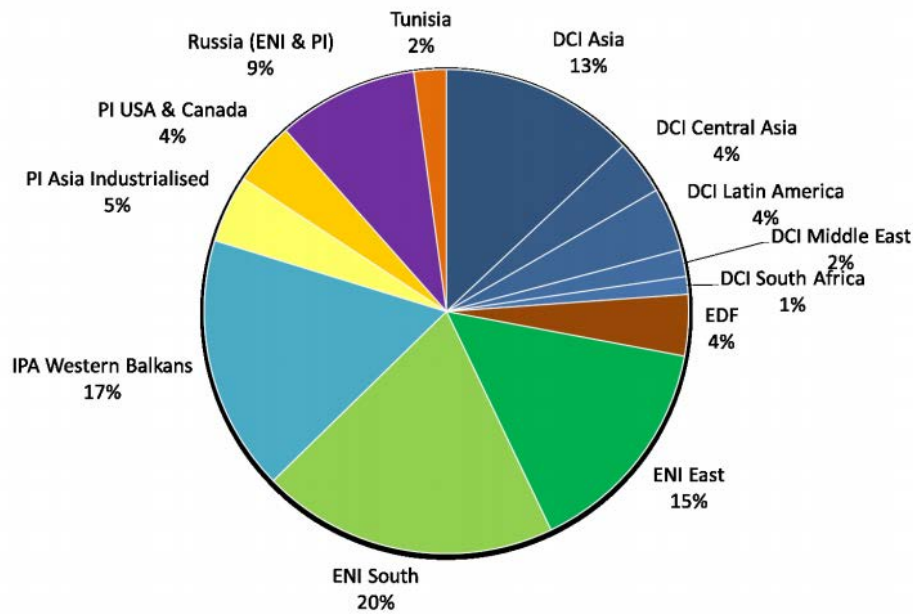
Source: European Commission[15]

As shown in Figure 2, the Southern dimension of the ENP is where more funds are allocated (20%), while 15% is allocated to the EaP countries. 2% is allocated for Tunisia because of the high-level commitment, or Tunisia window, that will be explained in section 4. In total, 37% is located for ENP countries, whose percentage is significant if compared to the 9% for Russia. Also, it is worth underlining that the EU only has a complementary and supporting competence[16] and not an exclusive one in the field of education. This represents a big limit for the EU capability in this area.

2.1 Brain drain vs brain circulation

When dealing with mobility programmes, one of the main concerns is the brain drain issue. For the EU PD, this phenomenon is really negative for two reasons. The first one is a matter of image. In fact, ENP countries could see these programmes, just as a way for the EU to steal their best brains.

The second reason is that, if most ENP Erasmus alumni remain within the EU, no soft power can be exercised on these countries. However, a recent study (not yet published) carried out by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) on the impact of

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[15] Data presented during the UniMed week conference, Brussels, 29 March 2017.
[16] European Union, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Consolidated Version), art. 6.

the EU support to HE in ENP countries through the previous programmes (e.g. Tempus, Alfa and Erasmus Mundus) shows that EU support is not producing brain drain.[17] In fact, only 14% of Erasmus alumni took their first job outside their home country, with a slight tendency to move back home in the long-term.[18]

The regulation establishing Erasmus+ makes clear that promoting brain circulation and EU's attractiveness are the main objectives of the external dimension of Erasmus+.[19] That is why major changes will be in force starting from mid-2018:

- students and researchers will be allowed to work during their mobility;
- at the end of the mobility, participants will be allowed to remain in an EU country for up to nine months;
- participants' family members will be allowed to come to Europe; and
- ENP nationals will be allowed to move around Europe without applying for a visa by just notifying the country to which they are moving.[20]

3. Assessing HE cooperation programmes towards Ukraine, Tunisia and Georgia

Ukraine is the ENP country with the highest number of mobility exchanges with the EU due to the size and geographic proximity of the country.

Table 1 shows that Ukraine is the first among the EaP countries between 2004 and 2013 for the number of participants to Erasmus Mundus under actions 1 and 2. The grand total for Ukraine is 1.830 participants over ten years. Table 2 shows the figures of the first two calls of Erasmus+ that awarded 4.524 participants (planned mobility flows). In just two years, the number of participants more than doubled compared to the first ten years, a growth of 147%.

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[17] Informal discussion with EU policy officer, UniMed week conference, *loc. cit.*
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] European Parliament and the Council, Regulation No 232/2014 of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, Official Journal of the European Union, L 77, 15 March 2014.
[20] European Commission, Visa rules being reviewed, making it easier for students to come to Europe, 22 March 2017, retrieved 14 April 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/updates/20170322-visa-rules-reviewed_en

Table 1: Erasmus Mundus combined mobility for EaP countries under Actions 1 & 2

Country	Action 1	Action 2	Total
Armenia	83	644	727
Azerbaijan	24	644	668
Belarus	69	829	898
Georgia	**79**	**838**	**917**
Moldova	67	775	842
Ukraine	**373**	**1.457**	**1.830**
TOTAL	695	5.187	5.882

Source: European Commission – DG EAC

Table 2: Erasmus+ mobility planned with EaP countries for 2015 & 2016 calls combined

Country	Total participants	Incoming (to EU)	Outgoing (from EU)
Armenia	1.013	746	267
Azerbaijan	888	618	270
Belarus	770	566	204
Georgia	**2.449**	**1.686**	**763**
Moldova	827	601	226
Ukraine	**4.524**	**3.456**	**1.068**
TOTAL	10.741	7.673	2.798

Source: European Commission – DG EAC

Also, UNESCO's figures on tertiary-level student mobility flows (table 3) reveal that most Ukrainian students prefer coming to the EU than to other regions of the world. Moreover, even if the first destination country for Ukrainian students is Russia, eight out of the first ten countries are EU member states. Of around 45.000 Ukrainian students abroad, almost 12.000 are studying in Russia. The number of students in the EU is more than double (around 28.000 students), with Poland and Germany as the most popular destinations.

Table 3: Ukraine tertiary-level student mobility flows

Destination country	Number of Ukrainian students
Russia Federation	12.043
Poland	9.485
Germany	5.850
Czechia	2.098
Italy	2.063
United States	1.509
France	1.131
Austria	1.099
United Kingdom	1.035
Hungary	913

Source: adopted from UNESCO Institute for statistics[21]

As highlighted in Table 2, Georgia is the second largest EaP country for the number of student mobility flows within Erasmus Mundus[22] and now Erasmus+. With 2.449 grants (1.686 outgoing to Europe and 763 incoming from Europe), Georgia is one of the most popular countries for credit mobility, ranked 8th among 131 EU partner countries. In relative numbers, Georgia can be defined as the most enthusiastic country about the EU mobility schemes, with 2.603 Erasmus participants since 2004 which correspond to almost 66% of Georgian students currently studying in Europe, and more than twice the number of Georgian students currently studying in Russia.

Table 4 shows the number of Tunisian participants in Erasmus Mundus. 642 Tunisians have benefited from mobility activities since 2004 to 2013, under the actions 1 and 2 of Erasmus Mundus.[23] This figure is disappointing, considering that the importance of contacts between peoples has been stressed for a long-time in the region. In fact, the concept of P2P contacts was introduced in the MENA region, even earlier the launch of the ENP. The social, cultural and human affairs pillar was one of the three pillars of the Euro-Med partnership that aimed to promote "understanding between

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[21] Retrieved 25 March 2017, http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow
[22] European Commission, From Erasmus Mundus...to Erasmus+ Eastern Partnership Countries, Facts and Figures, May 2014, retrieved 6 April 2017, http://www.ema.eu/fileadmin/content/News_item/EaP_E__facts_and_Figures.pdf
[23] European Commission, From Erasmus Mundus…to Erasmus+, Southern Mediterranean Countries Facts and Figures, June 2014.

cultures and exchanges between civil societies".[24] This declaration recognised "the importance of encouraging contacts and exchanges between young people".[25]

Table 4: Erasmus Mundus Combined mobility for Southern Mediterranean nationals Action 1 & Action 2

Country	Action 1	Action 2	Total
Algeria	67	612	679
Egypt	239	115	1000
Israel	117	462	579
Jordan	31	412	443
Lebanon	50	476	526
Libya	2	56	58
Morocco	77	642	719
Palestine	29	359	388
Syria	47	319	366
Tunisia	**101**	**541**	**642**
TOTAL	**760**	**4.640**	**5.400**

Source: European Commission[26]

As shown in Table 4, Tunisia is only the fourth country after Egypt, Morocco and Algeria for the number of mobility flows. This means that not enough has been done to promote P2P activities in that country. That is why in 2011, the Commission recalled that:

> Exchanges at university level are valuable, and fuller use should be made of Erasmus Mundus, Euromed Youth and Tempus to increase substantially the number of persons from Southern Mediterranean partner countries participating in these programmes.[27]

Figure 3 shows that, in the first year of mobility exchanges under Erasmus+, 639 people benefited from Erasmus grants from or to Tunisia, practically the same number of participants that Erasmus Mundus could mobilise over ten years. Consequently "Tunisia has been nominated as the focal point of the Erasmus+ Programme for the next years in the Neighbourhood South region".[28]

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[24] Euro-Mediterranean Conference, Barcelona declaration, 28 November 1995.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] From Erasmus Mundus to Erasmus+, Southern Mediterranean Countries Facts and Figures, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[27] European Commission, Partnership for democracy and prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean, COM(2011) 200 final, 8 mars 2011.
[28] Euro-Med Youth IV, final publication, 2016, p. 46, retrieved 27 March 2017, http://www.euromedyouth.net/IMG/pdf/euromed_youth_iv_-_final_publication.pdf

Figure 3: Erasmus+ HE in South Mediterranean countries 2015
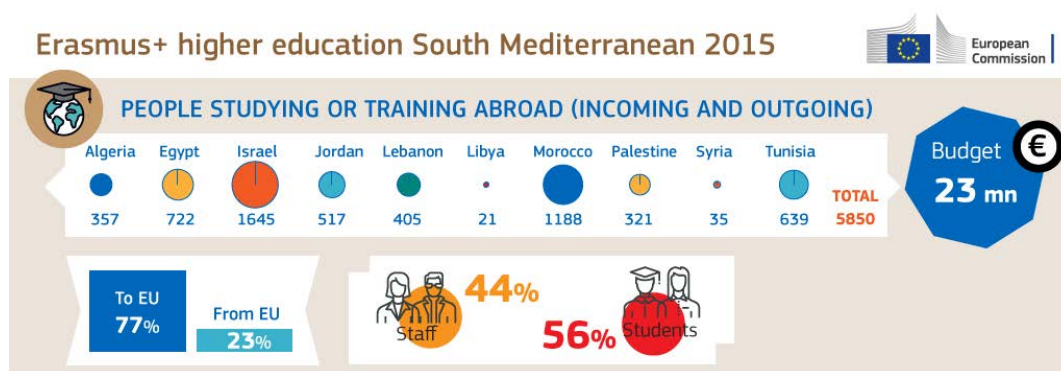
In the composition of mobility flows, the percentage of staff moving is almost the same as that of students. 77% of participants come to the EU, while only 23% are EU nationals going to the South Mediterranean. Finally, Tunisia is still not the first country for the number of mobility exchanges in the region, but it is expected to become the first one soon.

Table 5: Mobility planned for 2015 & 2016 Erasmus+ calls combined

Country	Total participants	Incoming (to EU)	Outgoing (from EU)
Algeria	822	677	145
Egypt	1.463	1.091	372
Israel	3.835	2.425	1.410
Jordan	1.190	829	361
Lebanon	1.022	773	249
Libya	32	32	
Morocco	2.480	1.830	677
Palestine	828	635	193
Syria	86	86	
Tunisia	**1.316**	**1.035**	**281**
TOTAL	**13.074**	**9.386**	**3.688**

Source: European Commission – DG EAC

As shown in Table 5, under the first two years of Erasmus+, 1.316 grants were planned for Tunisia, more than the double that the whole preceding period 2004 - 2013. This is also a direct effect of the 2015 ENP review in which it was foreseen that "the EU will significantly step up the scope for engagement of neighbourhood partners in Erasmus+, including a higher level of funding".[29]

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[29] European Commission, Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, JOIN (2015) 50 final, Brussels, 18 November 2015, p. 9.

However, when summing up the number of mobility flows under Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+, the result is 1.677 participants so far. Consequently, even though, over the last two years, the growth of participation has been remarkable, the overall figure is too small, especially if one compares with Georgia where the participants have been almost the double, although Georgia's population is one-third the size of Tunisia's. Therefore, as shown later in this work, the small number of mobility flows in Tunisia so far, does not leave room to talk about a consistent spreading of EU soft power through Erasmus+ in this country.

3.1 Results of the surveys

Regarding the first survey, 204 people representing all 16 countries taking part in the ENP participated. The results are in line with the outcomes of a 2013 Erasmus impact study:[30] "in all regions, Erasmus students as well as alumni feel significantly more related to Europe than non-mobiles".[31] Moreover, "more than 80% feel that their European attitude has been strengthened by mobility and this perception is especially strong in Southern and Eastern Europe (each 85%)".[32]

Nevertheless, the Erasmus impact study was addressed only to EU citizens as at that time Erasmus was still an intra-EU mobility programme. From my survey, this perception is even stronger among Erasmus participants coming from Southern and Eastern European neighbours. In fact, 92% of respondents feel closer to the EU's values after the Erasmus experience (Q3).

Regarding the data analysis, the first set of four questions aims to assess the EU soft power through the indicators of the EU's attractiveness, EU affiliation and EU preferences. To this end, each question starts with the following formula: *After studying/training in an EU country,* in order to measure the impact that the experience in the EU had on the respondents. Not surprisingly, more than 90% strongly agree or tend to agree that they are now more interested in some topics such as national

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[30] European Commission, 'The Erasmus Impact Study: Regional Analysis', 2013, retrieved 28 March 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2016/erasmus-impact_en.pdf
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[32] *Ibid.*

and European identity, multiculturalism and European cultures, EU perspectives and policies (Q2). Moreover, they feel closer to the EU's fundamental values, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, and they are more open to cultural and linguistic diversity (Q3). Finally, they would like their country to deepen its relations with the EU (Q4). Only the question about membership to the EU (Q5) did not reach 90% but was 81%. This is understandable, taking into account the sensitivity of the question.

The second set of questions aims to assess the changes in cultural and social perceptions that the Erasmus participants experienced. These changes were measured through the following indicators: tolerance, respect for other cultures and development of intercultural skills. Each question starts with the formula, *thanks to my experience abroad,* in order to measure the causal relationship between the Erasmus experience and the changes. Also for this set of questions, more than 90% strongly agree or tend to agree with the statements formulated. In particular, thanks to the experience abroad, they can tolerate the behaviour and values of other individuals better without compromising their own values (Q6). Also, they feel more comfortable if confronted with different values and other people's way of life (Q7). They feel more tolerant and respectful of other cultures (Q8). Moreover, they learned how to interact with people of different nations and became more open to cultural issues and foreign humour (Q9). Finally, they have a more positive social and cultural perception of other people with backgrounds different from theirs (Q10).

The survey's results outline a broad consensus on two key issues. First, ENP nationals feel more attracted by the EU after the Erasmus experience. Second, the mobility experience had a positive impact on the perception of others. De facto, the 2013 Erasmus impact study's results are corroborated with higher scores among ENP nationals. To investigate these phenomena in depth, a second survey, only addressed to my case studies' nationals (Ukrainians, Georgians and Tunisians), was set up.

The first question of the second survey was taken from the standard Eurobarometer 85 on public opinion in the European Union.[33] It aims to double-check how much Erasmus participants from Tunisia, Ukraine and Georgia are interested in European political matters. Indeed, the objective is to test the high score of the first survey through a more precise question.

Table 6: (Q1) How often would you say you discuss about EU politics?

Country	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Tunisia	23.53%	76.47%	0%
Georgia	45.95%	48.65%	5.41%
Ukraine	18.42%	68.42%	13.16%

The first survey showed that, around 90% of ENP Erasmus participants, feel more interested in EU politics. As shown in Table 6, this trend is confirmed in the second survey on the case studies' nationals. In fact, they all talk about EU politics frequently or occasionally. Georgian stand out with the higher score. Table 7 compares these results with the 2016 annual surveys on EU perceptions in my case studies.

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[33] Standard Eurobarometer 85 – Spring 2016 - Public opinion in the European Union, retrieved 28 March 2017, file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/eb85_anx_en%20(1).pdf

Table 7: Comparing how often Erasmus participants and public opinion talk about the EU.

Country	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Tunisian Erasmus	23.53%	76.47%	0%
Tunisian public opinion	7%	10%	74%
Georgian Erasmus	45.95%	48.65%	5.41%
Georgian public opinion	7%	37%	57%
Ukrainian Erasmus	18.42%	68.42%	13.16%
Ukrainian public opinion	8%	28%	65%

Concerning Ukraine, the 2016 annual survey on Ukrainian public opinion's perceptions of the EU, aske, "How often do you look for/access information on EU?".[34] Just 8% stated "frequently" and 65% "never". The difference is huge when comparing these results with my survey. Indeed, 18% of Ukrainian Erasmus alumni assert that they frequently discuss about EU politics, 68% occasionally and only 13% never. The same consideration applies for Georgia. In the annual survey of the EU Neighbours east platform[35] on Georgian public opinion, only 7% of respondents look frequently for information on the EU and 57% never. In my survey, the results are the other way around, with 46% and 5%, respectively. Regarding Tunisia, data from the opinion pool of the Southern Mediterranean countries report[36] show that 74% of Tunisians never look for information on the EU, while all Tunisian participants in my survey discuss frequently (24%) or occasionally (76%) EU politics.

This evidence is enough to assume that Erasmus participants are likely to become EU informal ambassadors for the simple reason that they speak more about the EU than their fellow nationals do.

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[34] European Commission, Annual Survey 2016 – Ukraine, 8 December 2016, retrieved 25 April 2017, http://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/annual-survey-2016-ukraine-factsheets

[35] European Commission, Annual Survey 2016 – Georgia, 8 December 2016, retrieved 28 March 2017, http://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/annual-survey-2016-georgia-factsheets

[36] European Commission, 'Factsheet Tunisia – Opinion Poll Southern Countries Report (Spring 2016)', retrieved 28 March 2017, http://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2017-01/Factsheet%20Tunisia%20-%20 Opinion%20Poll%20Southern%20Countries%20Report%20%28Spring%202016%29.pdf

In the second question, I asked about their three most important personal values. This question, taken from the standard Eurobarometer 84,[37] aims to assess the eventual difference between the most important values for my case studies' Erasmus participants and EU nationals. Table 8 shows that peace is always present among the three most important values for Ukrainian, Tunisian and Georgian Erasmus alumni, while for EU citizens, peace is only the sixth most important value.[38] Indeed, most Europeans surveyed did not experience war, and for them, it is a value given by default. This is not the case for Ukrainians, Tunisians and Georgians. The other values are almost the same, namely rule of law and human rights.

Table 8: (Q2) three most important values personally

	EU28	Tunisia	Georgia	Ukraine
1	The Rule of law	Human rights	Human rights	Peace
2	Respect for HRs	The rule of law	Peace	The rule of law
3	Human rights	Peace	Individual freedom	Democracy

The fourth question, also from the standard Eurobarometer 84,[39] aims to measure their EU affiliation. As shown in Table 9, ENP Erasmus participants feel even more attached to the EU than EU citizens themselves. In other words, Europeans appreciate the EU less that non-Europeans. This phenomenon deserves deeper research that is out of the scope of this work. Indeed, it would be interesting to compare ENP Erasmus feelings with EU Erasmus feelings and feelings of the public opinion from Ukraine, Tunisia and Georgia. However, as far as this work is concerned, the main

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[37] Standard Eurobarometer 84 – Autumn 2015 –Public opinion in the European Union, p. 211, retrieved 28 March 2017, file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/eb84_anx_en.pdf
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

finding is that the rate of EU affiliation among ENP Erasmus is high and this makes them carriers of EU soft power.

Table 9: (Q4) how attached you feel to the EU.

Countries	Very attached	Fairly attached	Not very attached	Not at all attached	Don't know
EU28	11%	38%	34%	15%	2%
Tunisians Erasmus	25%	56.25%	12.5%	6.25%	0%
Georgians Erasmus	27.27%	51.51%	15,15%	6.06%	0%
Ukrainians Erasmus	38.89%	47.22%	8.33%	2.78%	2.78%

The fifth question is not taken from any Eurobarometer. In fact, the rationale behind it is not to compare the results with EU nationals' opinions, but to see how far the mobility experience has influenced ENP Erasmus participants regarding their European host. In my first survey, 81% of respondents want his/her country to join the EU. In my second survey, the question has been reformulated in order to have a less personalised answer. Table 10 summarises the answers.

Table 10: (Q5) how likely is that your country join the EU one day?

Country	Most likely	Likely	Not likely	Impossible
Tunisia	18.75%	12.5%	18.75%	50%
Ukraine	16.67%	41.67%	36.11%	5.56%
Georgia	24.24%	51.52%	24.24%	0%

Concerning Tunisia, 50% of respondents think that it is impossible that their country will join the EU and around 19% that it is not likely. Regarding Ukraine, almost 60% assert that Ukraine will join the EU. However, the most interesting outcome is in regards to Georgia. Almost 75% of Georgian Erasmus participants are persuaded that Georgia is going to join the EU, and nobody states that it is impossible. It shows that Georgian Erasmus participants are the most in favour of a European choice.

This is very interesting when comparing Georgia with Tunisia and Ukraine. The last two countries are much closer to the EU's borders than Georgia. Ukraine even has common land borders with four EU member states (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania) and Tunisia is just a few kilometres from Italy, but it is Georgia, located in the Caucasian region between Turkey and Russia, that seems to be the most attracted by the EU. This Georgian enthusiasm is confirmed by the 2016 annual survey report of the Eastern partnership countries, in which is stated that "Georgia is the country that is the most positively-oriented towards the EU".[40]

4. Potential and limits of Erasmus+ in Ukraine, Georgia and Tunisia

From the Erasmus+ early results' evaluation and from the position papers of important stakeholders, some initial findings about the international dimension of Erasmus+ can be already highlighted. Firstly, incoming and outgoing mobility flows are not always balanced, and the budget is too low to respond adequately in certain regions (i.e. MENA). The latter is a problem concerning the whole programme in both intra and extra-EU dimensions. In fact, there is gap between the political priorities and economic means. Consequently, the Erasmus+ budget represents just the 1% of the EU multiannual financial framework (MFF). This seems too little for one of the most important and successful programmes of European integration's history that is considered a political priority also in EU external relations.

Summing up, the first two years of Erasmus+ brought about three principal positive developments regarding its external dimension: the increase in the number of planned mobility flows compared to the previous programming period; the involvement of less traditional European countries

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[40] European Commission. 'Annual survey report of the Eastern partnership countries', 2016, p.12, retrieved 28 March 2017, http://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2017-02/EU%20Neighbours%20East_Full.report_6.pdf

in the region (i.e. northern countries); and the visible impact on some partner countries' universities through the creation or the strengthening of international relations offices.

4.1 Georgia & Ukraine

It is important to highlight that the EaP cooperation is more structured than the southern dimension of the ENP. A clear example is the Eastern Partnership Youth Window, which aims to promote active citizenship among young nationals of EaP countries. It is part of the EU for Youth programme that includes a young European neighbours network. The latter was launched in June 2016 to foster the cooperation between young people and youth organisations within the EU and its Eastern Neighbours.[41] It includes a young European ambassadors' initiative wherein participants "to exchange experience(s), discuss matters of direct concern to young people, share best practice and work together for a better future".[42]

The idea of European ambassadors is strictly related to the new concept of EU PD. As a matter of fact, the 2015 Riga declaration[43] has strengthened the platform four of the EaP dedicated to contacts between people. Consequently, all the aforementioned activities are the direct effect of this reinforcement reflecting the core objectives of the 2014-2017 platform four's work programme.[44]

Indeed, the new Eastern Partnership Youth Window is one of these activities directly financed by Erasmus+ under the key action two (capacity building). It will be possible to measure the impact of these initiatives recently launched only in the coming years. To date, they prove how the EU believes that investments in young European ambassadors can spread its PD.

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[41] European Commission, Youth info pack, *loc. cit.*
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] EEAS, Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Riga, 21-22 May 2015, retrieved 5 April 2017, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/eastern/docs/riga-declaration-220515-final_en.pdf.
[44] European Commission, Eastern Partnership, Platform 4 'Contacts between People', Core objectives and Work programme 2014-2017, 15 January 2014, retrieved 5 April 2017, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/eastern/platforms/docs/work_programme_2014_2017_platform4_en.pdf

Moreover, the recent achievements in the field of visa liberalisation will foster the mobility between Georgia[45] and Ukraine[46] and the 26 countries of the Schengen area. In fact, these initiatives represent the premises for an increase of contacts and socialisation between peoples. Indeed, the Erasmus programme has a higher potential in the EaP than in the Southern Mediterranean countries. First, because it is easier to deal with six countries rather than with ten. Second, because EaP countries are in the EHEA and this stimulates European universities to cooperate with them. Third, because of the size of the countries. In fact, apart from Ukraine and Belarus, the EaP countries are medium/small-size countries where Erasmus's funds can make the difference. Fourth, because there is less differentiation. In fact, the Youth window is open to all EaP countries, while in the MENA region, as shown later, a youth window is open just for Tunisia. The same happens with the association to the Horizon 2020 programme and to the key action 2 (i.e. capacity building) of the Erasmus+ programme. In order to explore potential and limits of Erasmus+, it is necessary to narrow the analysis on my two case studies from the EaP. Regarding Georgia, the high number of Georgian respondents in the first survey (almost 30%) has been an incentive to deep the analysis on this country. Indeed, from a superficial investigation, one can easily realise that the number of Erasmus exchanges in proportion with the population is huge. Especially when comparing Georgia and Ukraine, which are the two EaP countries having the most important number of students coming to the EU under Erasmus+. Respectively 1.686 and 3.456 mobility flows planned. The same proportion is respected in the data of students and staffs coming to Europe from 2004 to 2014 under Erasmus Mundus.[47] This means that the number of Erasmus participants in Ukraine is a little more than the double of Erasmus participants in Georgia. Nevertheless, Ukrainian population (45.2 million) is ten times the size of the Georgian population (4.4 million). Moreover, the age structure of the population is similar. In fact,

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[45] EEAS, Visa Free Travel comes into effect for Georgia, 29 March 2017, retrieved 5 April 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/23697/visa-free-travel-comes-effect-georgia_en

[46] European Conseil, Visas: Council confirms agreement on visa liberalisation for Ukrainians, 2 March 2017, retrieved 5 April 2017, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/02-visa-liberalisation-ukraine/

[47] European Commission, Erasmus – Facts, Figures & Trends, The European Union support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2013-2014, *loc. cit.*

the age group from 15 to 29, which is the greatest beneficiary of the Erasmus actions, represents 20.2% of the population in Georgia[48] and 18.2% in Ukraine.[49] Therefore, on a weighted average, the Erasmus+ programme has an impact on Georgian population much higher than on Ukrainians. As a measure of that, the ratio of the Erasmus participants over the total population of the country is provided for both Georgia and Ukraine. The results show that for Georgians the possibilities to benefit from Erasmus grants is much higher in proportion to the whole national population. For this reason, when it comes to EU soft power, Erasmus+ has an enormous potential in Georgia while in Ukraine, it is limited by the high number of inhabitants.

4.2 Tunisia

Tunisia has a privileged status under Erasmus+. In fact, among the South Mediterranean countries, it is the only one that can participate in the key action 2 (i.e. capacity building). Moreover, EU and Tunisia recently launched a Youth partnership, called *Tunisia window*. This makes Tunisia the only ENP country to have a dedicated entry in the international dimension budget of Erasmus+. This entry amounts to 2% of the total budget on top of the 20% already foreseen for the ENP South dimension. In short, ten million more for Tunisians distributed as following: three for HE cooperation and capacity building, six for learning mobility and one for youth organisations. The European Commission is passing to Tunisian universities the following messages. First, to work with non-traditional partners in Europe. That is to say, with Nordic countries, like Ireland or Netherlands and also with Eastern Europe countries. Second, to be involved in the drafting of the application by the European universities and to negotiate carefully their inter-institutional agreements. Third, to benefit from the specific Tunisia window in general.[50] This shows the EU's commitment to invest in Tunisian young people.

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[48] Population pryramid.net, Georgia, retrieved 27 April 2017, https://www.populationpyramid.net/georgia/2017/
[49] Population pryramid.net, Ukraine, retrieved 27 April 2017, https://www.populationpyramid.net/ukraine/2016/
[50] Informal discussion with EU policy officer, UniMed week conference, *loc. cit.*

Concerning the learning mobility of individuals, under the first two years of Erasmus+, '9.386 grants were provided to students and teachers from southern Mediterranean countries, who came to study, receive training or teach in Europe'.[51] Among them, 1.035 Tunisians (planned figures) went to the EU between 2015 and 2016 thanks to Erasmus+ and around 800 participated to Erasmus Mundus from 2004 to 2014. Comparing with Ukrainian and Georgian figures, Tunisia is, among my case studies, the country with less participants ever. But, like Georgia for the EaP, Tunisia is the first among the North African countries when considering the Erasmus participants' ratio over the total national population. Indeed, Tunisia has 12 million of inhabitants, Morocco 35 million, Algeria 40 million and Egypt 91 million, while Libyans have not been granted so far. Erasmus+ 'also funded 3.688 Europeans in the opposite direction'.[52] Moreover, the EU 'hopes to finance the mobility needs of at least 3,000 Tunisians over the period 2015-2020'.[53] This will be salutary for a country, like Tunisia, that has a young profile with a median age of 30.5 years. For this reason, the programmes of HE cooperation can be efficient in Tunisia because of the high level of school life expectancy (primary to tertiary education) around 15 years. Therefore, many students reach the level of education in which they can beneficiate from EU mobility programmes. However, Erasmus's potential in Tunisia has been limited so far by the low number of grants.

4.3 Theorising the Erasmus+ Programme

Figure 4 shows that PD aims to enhance EU's values and interests among non-EU students through P2P activities. So, if someone was wondering why EU awards grants to ENP nationals to study at the College of Europe, the answer is that it is a matter of PD. In fact, these grants were

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[51] European Commission*, Erasmus+: An important link for the modernisation of university education in Tunisia*, EU Neighbours south, retrieved 20 March 2017, http://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/Features/2017-02/Erasmus%2B%20Tunisia%20EN.pdf
[52] European Commission, Erasmus - Facts, Figures & Trends, *op. cit.*
[53] *Ibid.*

distributed in the past through the Jean Monnet action, that 'aims to support the College of Europe as it is an institution pursuing an aim of European interest'.[54]

Figure 4: Partnership instrument's infographic

The Jean Monnet action is a clear tool of EU PD. Indeed, this action, is part of Erasmus+ since 2014, as noted above. The main goal of Jean Monnet activities is 'to increase knowledge about European integration in strategic countries by promoting teaching, research and debate'.[56] This proves that Erasmus+ is financing activities considered EU PD that are supposed to increase EU soft power. Moreover, the same fiche refers to Erasmus+ and underlines that one of the objectives is to enhance cooperation in HE through the promotion of students and academic staff mobility.[57] The

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[54] European Parliament and the Council, Regulation establishing 'Erasmus+': The Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, Official Journal of the European Union, L347, 20 December 2013, p. 59.
[55] European External Action Service's website, retrieved 20 April 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/documents/20160620_fpi_publicdiplomacy_infographic_web.pdf
[56] European Commission, Action Fiche for Public Diplomacy, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[57] *Ibid.*

aforementioned fiche is part of the implementation of the PI.[58] The latter has four main objectives

and one of these is to promote EU PD. The PI 'can fund activities in any non-EU country, with an

emphasis on partner countries of strategic interest to the EU'.[59] That is exactly the case of ENP

countries.

It is worth underlining that Zichner and Saran, writing about the impact of Erasmus Mundus

in Moldova, have already highlighted that "recalling the layer of identity politics inherent in the

Erasmus programme, one can look at it through a similar lens, namely that of cultural or public

diplomacy".[60] In fact, spreading EU PD has been one of the main goals of the ENP since the 2015

review as "better communicating and promoting EU policies will be at the heart of the new ENP".[61]

What is more, "improved public diplomacy will contribute to better explaining the rationale of EU

policies and the positive impact of concrete EU actions".[62] In addition, in the same communication,

it is clearly underlined that "the EU should engage more on this public diplomacy agenda with

governments, civil society, the business community, academia and other citizens in partner countries,

in particular youth".[63] Moreover, the European Commission[64] makes explicit reference to the

Erasmus Mundus programme as the best example of "inter-cultural exchanges of students, researchers

and alumni".[65]

Furthermore, it asserts that "the Commission will support the establishment of Erasmus+

alumni groups in partner countries and cooperation between these groups and EU delegation".[66] Also,

the European Parliament is working on an own-initiative about a new strategy to put culture at the

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[58] European Commission, Service for foreign policy instrument, retrieved 14 April 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/what-we-do/partnership_instrument_en.htm
[59] European Commission, Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations, Brussels, JOIN (2016) 29 final, 8 June 2016.
[60] H. Zichner and V. Saran, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
[61] JOIN (2015) 50 final, *op. cit.*, p.20.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[64] JOIN (2016) 29 final, *loc. cit.*
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[66] JOIN (2016) 29 final, *loc. cit.*

heart of EU international relations.[67] In the Committees' draft report, the MEPs ask "the Commission to strengthen the international dimension of Erasmus".[68]

As a result of all these considerations, it seems that the EU considers the external dimension of Erasmus+ a tool of PD. For this reason, even if this work focuses mainly on the key action one (i.e. learning mobility of individuals), it was interesting to combine all Erasmus+ key actions with the PD's elements according to Cull's theory. This exercise illustrates that the key actions of Erasmus+, as implemented in the extra-EU mobility, meet some elements of PD.

Table 13: Comparison between Erasmus+ Key Actions and Public Diplomacy's elements

Erasmus+ Key Actions	Public Diplomacy's elements
Learning mobility of individuals	One-way exchange diplomacy
Capacity building	Cultural diplomacy
Policy reform	Advocacy/ Cultural diplomacy
Jean Monnet	Cultural diplomacy/ One-way exchange diplomacy

To date, key action one (extra-EU mobility of individuals) can be considered a one-way exchange diplomacy rather than an exchange diplomacy *tout court*. This happens for two reasons. The first one is the imbalance between mobility flows, with around 75% of ENP nationals coming to the EU and only 25% of EU nationals going in ENP countries. The second reason is the composition of EU participants. In fact, they are mostly staff (professors, academics). This means that it is not possible to talk about a peer education's phenomenon; instead, it can be better considered as a passage of knowledge's phenomenon (how to do things) from EU staff to ENP nationals.

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[67] European Parliament, *Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations*, Own-initiative procedure, 2016/2240(INI).

[68] European Parliament, Draft Report on Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations, 2016/2240(INI), Brussels, 22 March 2017, p. 8.

Key action two (i.e. capacity building) is an example of cultural diplomacy. In fact, capacity building means exchange of good practices, and it fits very well the notion of cultural diplomacy in the sense of exchange of cultural ways of life.

Finally, Erasmus+, through the policy reform's action, aims to support and facilitate "the modernisation of education and training systems, as well as support for the development of European youth policy, through (…) the structured dialogue with young people".[69] According to Cull, the PD's element of advocacy:

> is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea, or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public.[70]

It therefore seems that the key action three of Erasmus+ can be considered an example of advocacy or, at least, of cultural diplomacy, while the Jean Monnet action aims to make known the EU achievements overseas, making it a clear example of cultural diplomacy. However, when it subsidises, the mobility of non-EU nationals (like at the College of Europe in the past), it can be considered a one-way exchange diplomacy as well.

5. Conclusion

My survey results prove that Erasmus+ leads to changes in social and cultural perceptions independently of being a tool of EU soft power. In order for Erasmus+ to be also an instrument of soft power, the three following conditions must be satisfied:

1. **Avoiding brain drain** and **promoting brain circulation**. The EU must encourage people coming to Europe, thanks to Erasmus+, to go back to their countries and help the development

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[69] European Parliament and the Council, Regulation establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[70] N.J.Cull, *Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories*, *loc. cit.*

over there. Otherwise, the personal Erasmus experience cannot have an impact on the alumni's home country or region.

2. **Small country** with **limited population** in which the EU funds can make the difference. This condition excludes Ukraine from being considered a fertile ground to exercise EU soft power through Erasmus+.

3. A **high level of mobility flows in both directions** (to and from the EU). In fact, EU nationals going to ENP countries reach people that are outside the range of Erasmus+ targets. In other words, they meet and socialise with people who are not likely to participate in mobility exchanges because of age, social or economic obstacles. This condition excludes Tunisia from being considered a fertile ground to exercise soft power through Erasmus+. In fact, as shown in Section 4, the number of mobility flows has not been high. Moreover, the balance of participants' origin is too heavily in favour of Tunisia. Just one participant out of four is a European going to Tunisia. In short, there are too few EU nationals going to Tunisia in order to reach enough Tunisian people outside the range of Erasmus+ targets. The last consideration applies to Ukraine as well. In this case, even fewer than one participant out of four is European. Finally, in Georgia, the figures show that more than one participant out of three is a EU citizen. So, once again, Georgia meets the condition to be considered a fertile ground to exercise EU soft power through Erasmus+.

Table 14 applies the three conditions stemming from my case studies. Consequently, my hypothesis is not supported for Tunisia and Ukraine. However, there is a significant difference between these two countries.

Table 14: Conditions under which consider Erasmus+ a tool of EU soft power

Soft power Conditions	Georgia	Tunisia	Ukraine
Avoiding brain drain & promoting brain circulation	✓	✓	✓
Small country with limited population	✓	✓	✗
High level of mobility flows from and to the EU	✓	✗	✗

Tunisia does not fulfil just the condition related to the level of mobility flows and their direction. This means that an increase of funds would be enough to fulfil all conditions. Ukraine also does not fulfil the territorial and demographic conditions. This means that the EU budget's efforts would be too onerous to reach substantial numbers of Ukrainians through Erasmus+. In addition, Russia, as shown in Section 3, has a greater influence on Ukrainian students' mobility, while this is not the case for Georgia and Tunisia.

In conclusion, the answer to my research question is that Erasmus+ is a tool of EU soft power because EU institutions believe it is a means to clinch the European choice of ENP countries. This is proved to the extent that my hypothesis is supported in the Georgian case study. However, in the light of my research, and of the ongoing debate on the EU PD and international cultural relations' strategy, a consistency between the external dimension of Erasmus+ and the concept of PD has been highlighted. Hence, future research should take this into account. To this end, an interesting hypothesis would be that Erasmus+ is a PD's tool rather than directly a soft power's one, but useful to spread EU soft power. Therefore, further research on the relationship between PD and the external dimension of Erasmus+ in all its actions could provide valuable complementary findings. Then, it would be interesting to apply the conditions stemming from my research to all EU partner countries, even beyond the ENP countries, to assess whether they are fulfilled in other cases as well.

5.2 Policy recommendations

In order to conclude this paper, in view of the aforementioned new programme for the period 2021-2027, the mid-term review of both the Erasmus+ and the ENI regulations and the ongoing debate on international cultural relations' strategy, relevant policy recommendations are listed below.

First, it is advisable that in the next programme proposal, the European Commission defines the nature of the external dimension of Erasmus+. Currently, the situation is paradoxical, as mobility and capacity building actions are used by the European institutions in all kind of documents on PD and international cultural relation. However, these are not aims recognised in the Erasmus+ legal basis itself. In fact, in the regulation establishing Erasmus+[71], there is no reference to public or cultural diplomacy. This could be also a way to help the EEAS in legitimising the new PD's narrative.

Also, many have underlined that social goals in the Erasmus+ programme are not clearly operationalised and EU institutions are stressing too much the employability benefit of the programme and not enough the social and cultural benefits. That is why, it is recommended to provide explanations on how more substantial intercultural understanding for the benefit of strengthened inter-regional co-operation, particularly between Europe and other parts of the world, can be achieved.

My third recommendation would be to respect and implement the co-ownership principle of the ENP. This means that ENP countries should be programme countries and not partner countries. In this way, they would share the same rights and duties foreseen by the Erasmus+ regulation for programme countries. This would also encourage EU stakeholders (i.e. universities) to boost the number of exchanges with these countries, as they will have the same responsibilities. Moreover, this possibility is already foreseen in the regulation establishing Erasmus+ in article 24[72]. With a full

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[71] European Parliament and the Council, Regulation establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, *loc. cit.*

[72] Regulation establishing 'Erasmus+', *loc. cit.*

implementation of this provision, ENP countries would have a national agency rather than a small Erasmus+ office. Therefore, it is crucial for the interest of both EU and ENP countries to implement article 24.

The fourth recommendation would be to balance the mobility flows. In other words, it is important to encourage more Europeans to cross the EU's borders and spend some time working or studying in a ENP country in order to fully implement the ENP co-ownership principle. Mobility should not be just unidirectional (from ENP countries to EU) but also bidirectional, from EU to ENP countries. Already in view of the 2015 ENP review, some stakeholders have asked the European Commission to "allow for better reciprocity in the exchanges between EU and neighbourhood countries".[73] Therefore, the "EU should stimulate and support measures for promoting outgoing mobility to institutions in neighbourhood countries",[74] for instance, "by supporting universities and thus providing incentives for developing and enhancing mobility towards the ENP partners".[75] This is also important, as noted above, to reach people that are outside the range of Erasmus+ targets.

The fifth recommendation is to promote a South-South mobility scheme, as the main problem of the Mediterranean region is that it is the less-integrated region in the world. That is why the EU should promote an intra-MENA academic mobility scheme, following the example of the intra-Africa Academic mobility programme. The latter is a kind of Erasmus among African countries. In fact, it "grants scholarships to students (at masters and doctoral level) and to university staff members (academic and administrative) to carry out studies, research, teaching, and training assignments in another African country".[76] Similarly, the European Commission should enhance labour market

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[73] European Universities Sssociation, The role of universities in the European Neighbourhood Policy, EUA's response to the public consultation, "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy", 2015.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] European Commission, Intra-Africa Academic mobility scheme leaflet, retrieved 2 April 2017 http://www.erasmusplus.tn/uploads/FCK_files/IntraAfrica_Leaflet_A4_100x210_EN_PRINT(1).pdf

orientation given that in 2050 Africa's population is set to double,[77] making Africa the most populated continent.

Another valuable recommendation is that, Commissioner Navracsics should join the European Commission's project team "Europe in the world" which is the cluster of Commissioners dealing with EU external policy and led by the High Representative Federica Mogherini. In fact, regarding the role of Erasmus+ in the EU strategy on international cultural relations, Erasmus+ should become a pillar of this strategy. Other EU actors also think so: some MEPs believe that Erasmus "would be the single most efficient instrument of EU international cultural relations if it could be enhanced through much increased funding and staff, notably for the youth exchange program with third countries".[78]

Finally, if the EU wants to build a "European Neighbourhood Erasmus generation" that can make the difference in shaping political decisions in ENP countries close to the EU preferences, the EU must foresee more funds and finance more mobility exchanges. In Europe, the Erasmus scheme achieved amazing results over the last thirty years. This means that it is not something that can happen in few months. It is a long-term process that can lead to important and valuable results only step-by-step.

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[77] Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 2016 World Population Data Sheet, retrieved 24 Avril 2017, http://www.prb.org/Publications/DataSheets/2016/2016-world-population-data-sheet.aspx
[78] MEPs Jordi Solé, Igor Šoltes, Helga Trüpel, Amendments Tabled in committee, Amendment 233, 4 April 2017, p. 107.

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