



## Story

# Erasmus: exchanging skills for life

**Every year over 180,000 students across Europe study in the Erasmus University exchange programme. Students spend a semester or academic year at a foreign university to develop their language skills and for new experiences abroad. Here Scottish MEP Alyn Smith and a Lithuanian intern Eglė Draugelytė at the European Parliament talk about their experiences.**

A recent study by the European Commission which looked at the 2007-2008 academic year found that German students were the most enthusiastic Erasmus students. They were followed by France and Spain. All three countries are also the biggest recipients of Erasmus students.

It is estimated that approximately four percent of all European students participate in the Erasmus programme at some stage during their studies.

Scottish Nationalist MEP **Alyn Smith** was an Erasmus student in Germany back in 1990. He spent the academic year at Ruprecht-Karls Universität in Heidelberg. As he explains "at 19 I learned a lot about living away from home and about how to be more independent".

Mr Smith pointed out that the main "difficulty" was the German language. "But we got by, and the Erasmus students helped each other" he told us.

He later worked in Brussels for the Scottish government's representation to the EU. Now, as a MEP, he has started an information initiative to encourage more Scottish students to apply for an Erasmus semester.

**Eglė Draugelytė** from Lithuania is currently an intern in the Parliament. She applied for Erasmus last year and studied half a year in Bordeaux in France.

She sees the Erasmus semester as a very good opportunity to expand her personal skills in a multicultural environment, "I became a more communicative, tolerant and flexible person" she says of her experiences.

Eglė is hopeful of the effect Erasmus will have on her future job prospects: "Doing an Erasmus semester indicates that you are more involved and interested in European issues than your competitors. I believe that my semester in Bordeaux helped me to get where I am today. Erasmus will always look great on my CV, because that one word explains the whole experience of studying abroad."

On October 21, 2008, the Parliament voted in favor of establishing the second phase of the Erasmus Mundus (2009-2013). Erasmus Mundus aims at promoting European higher education as a centre of excellence in the world.