

According to Article 43 of the Statute of the University of Belgrade, (*Gazette of the University of Belgrade*, Nr. 201/2018, 207/2019, 213/2020,214/2020 and 217/20), the Senate adopted the following document at the meeting held of March 24, 2021:

## **MOBILITY STRATEGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE**

### **Introduction: New Reality**

The University of Belgrade recognizes and follows contemporary dynamics in education and research development, as well as the ever-increasing pace of changes in all segments of the society, adapting its activities and efforts to these changes and the arising needs, accordingly. The turn of 2019 saw the humanity facing a global threat and turbulent events, which changed overnight the circumstances, conditions and the very way of life for individuals, as well as entire systems, institutions and countries alike.

The new reality highlighted the importance of competence, responsibility, strategic planning and swift and high adaptability of educational systems to specificities and requirements of the new circumstances. In light of these newly-identified changes, it became necessary to review the existing mechanisms and the accompanying services provided by higher education, internationalization and mobility being under direct influence of more frequent and more dynamic changes in global circumstances. With that in mind, internationalization and mobility are inextricably tied to strategic resource management.

### **Reasons for Redefining the Mobility Strategy and Introducing New Framework**

Since the start of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ program period, which brought the European and larger, international, area even closer together than its forerunners, bringing many novel ideas into it, the perspective of the University of Belgrade vis-à-vis internationalization and mobility were influenced by three milestones:

1. The change in status of the Republic of Serbia within the framework of the Erasmus+ program
2. **Membership of the University of Belgrade in the Circle U. university alliance**
3. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

These changes have been recognized as the main pillars of the redefined Mobility Strategy.

### **Goals and Tasks**

#### **1. The change in status of the Republic of Serbia within the framework of the Erasmus+ program**

The University of Belgrade has been participating in the Erasmus+ program since 2015, first as a partner university, without the same rights and responsibilities as program universities (EU and some non-EU countries). During this period, the University of Belgrade had continuously achieved excellent results with respect to the number of implemented mobility flows, as well as building and strengthening all segments of international cooperation in general, which was recognized by the European Commission as an example of good practice in this region. Taking this into consideration, the University of Belgrade was well-prepared for the change in status of the

Republic of Serbia within the Erasmus+ program from partner to program country, respectively, taking on all responsibilities and commitments embodied by the new status.

In accordance with the above, within the framework of the new status, the University of Belgrade is guided by strategic interests and goals of its members, following the guidelines and recommendations of the relevant strategies of the Republic of Serbia, while at the same time taking into consideration its own responsibility towards society at large. The change in status itself enables the University to further build its capacity through international cooperation mechanisms within the domain of administrative support, as well as within the domains of teaching and scientific-research work.

Goals achieved in the previous period refer to the following:

- Building administrative service capacity by introducing new and improving existing procedures, staff training, designing and constructing tools for implementing mobility
- Wide-reaching promotion of the concept of mobility at the University of Belgrade and informing students and staff of its importance, which resulted in the increase in both interest and the number of implemented mobility flows at the University
- Improving cooperation in the field of scientific-research work and innovation
- Building teaching capacity at the University of Belgrade
- Increasing the study program offer in the English language
- Automatic recognition of credits acquired during mobility

In accordance with the newly-assumed responsibilities and commitments, and in light of new global developments, the University of Belgrade will focus on the following goals in the new phase of the Erasmus+ program (2021-2027):

- Improvement of all results achieved up until now
- Implementation of all available mobility, as an instrument of achieving the goals set in the Internationalization Strategy and other strategic goals relevant for further development of the University of Belgrade
- Enabling the sustainability of established partnerships through strategic mobility planning
- Strategic approach to the issue of brain drain: increasing employability through international experience gained with student mobility for studies and traineeships, as a recommendation for companies at local level, especially members of those Chambers of Commerce with which the University of Belgrade cooperates
- Promotion of the University of Belgrade at international fairs with the purpose of attracting and increasing the number of international students, joint scientific-research work, improvements in teaching capacity
- Brand promotion and increasing the visibility of the University of Belgrade at the intranational level

- Contribution to the Circle-U Alliance

## **2. Joining of the University of Belgrade to the Circle U. Alliance**

Participation in leading university associations, networks and alliances has been a continuous commitment of the University of Belgrade and one of its main advancements. In turn, this enables a better positioning of the University of Belgrade in international circles, as well as easier cooperation and communication with partners from abroad and joint work on solving specific problems and improvement in teaching, scientific-research work and innovations. The University of Belgrade became a member of the prestigious university alliance called Circle U. in 2019.

Circle U. is a part of the European Commission's initiative to form university alliances and networks throughout the old continent. The goal of each of these alliances is to form strong bonds among its members by enhancing mobility of students and staff, setting up joint study programs, encouraging the cooperation with the business sector, aiming at introducing innovations and modernization of the curricula. The three-year pilot project was selected in the 2019/20 funding application. Besides the University of Belgrade, the members of the alliance are the following, prestigious, European universities: University of Oslo (Norway), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany), King's College London (UK), UCLouvain (Belgium), Université de Paris (France), Aarhus University (Denmark).

The project's 7 Work Packages foresee a series of activities to be implemented, including those related to developing a joint policy framework and IT infrastructure for cooperation and enhancing mobility within the alliance. The main goal of these activities is to enable common priorities and practice within the alliance, efficient management of mobility and inter-institutional agreements, simplify physical mobility of students and staff, set up virtual mobility and blended learning opportunities and enable cooperation in the field of digital learning. The latter seem to be especially important taking the global epidemiological situation into account.

Student and staff mobility being one of the key mechanisms in delivering the goals of the project, the University of Belgrade has allocated a number of Erasmus+ mobility flows towards implementing mobility with Circle U. partner universities.

## **3. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic**

The crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak has had an enormous impact on the organization of higher education, especially in the aspect of internationalization and international cooperation. Distance learning has been present at the University of Belgrade for a long period of time, but nonetheless, one of the strategic commitments of the University is to further build the capacity and developing infrastructure for distance learning. Epidemiological situation has additionally sped up the acceptance and acknowledgement of the importance of digital learning, as a manner of learning on a par with traditional ways of teaching and instruction.

In addition to the above, due to the fact that international travel has been seriously restricted, the corona-crisis has significantly influenced international cooperation and international mobility. This, in turn, has prompted the need for redefining the concept of mobility, by giving it a broader context, meaning additional flexibility and continual adaptation of internal systems and

infrastructure for the purpose of acting in the best interest of students and staff of the University of Belgrade.

Goals set in the previous period, in the context of strengthening the digital framework, have unquestionably been intensified, due to covid-19 pandemic. In the coming period, the University of Belgrade will rapidly work on creating opportunities for the so-called opt-out online mobility, which represents an activity defined by the Circle U. alliance project, with the purpose to expose as many students as possible to the experience of international academic surroundings, particularly those in which physical student mobility at a partner institution abroad is not possible.

Opt-out online mobility would imply the possibility of opting out of the regular mobility and opting for online mobility without any consequences to the candidate, in such cases when the selected candidate, for personal reasons or other, previously determined, outside factors or due to *force majeure*, is forced to withdraw from physical mobility abroad. The host institution would have to agree to these terms as well, which should be stipulated in the inter-institutional agreement with each partner university.

Considering the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future epidemiological circumstances, the University of Belgrade is preparing and rapidly adapting to the needs and requirements of the new reality. For these reasons, the coming period will be dedicated to the parallel development of different ways to implement mobility:

- academic (traditional, physical) mobility
- blended mobility
- virtual mobility

In view of the above, the following key activities have been defined:

1. Building technical and digital capacity of the institution as a whole
2. Training all personnel involved in organizing and implementing mobility
3. Preparing digital content for implementing blended and virtual mobility
4. Reviewing and modifying procedures in order for them to cover the implementation of all types of mobility

The University of Belgrade will carry out all goals and activities referred to in this document with due care and diligence, strictly following all precautionary measures, while following and adapting to changing circumstances, in the best interest of all participants included in implementing mobility.