



ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT

The Higher Education Technical School of Professional Studies in Novi Sad (VTSNS) was founded in 1959, and today it is one of the leading higher education institutions of its kind in Serbia, offering professional knowledge and training from the fields of mechanical, traffic, electrical, IT, graphic and protection engineering. Since 2007, all our study programmes have been in compliance with the European educational standards stated in the Bologna Declaration.

In the past years, thousands of students have graduated from the VTSNS, which is a significant contribution to the educational, social and economic development of the entire region, for our regular students are not just from Serbia. They have always come from the neighbouring countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Macedonia due to the similarity of languages we use, and cultural and historic ties. Nowadays, two of the countries are in the EU and others are on the way to join it, hence, we find the partnerships with their HEIs highly interesting for mobility purposes of both staff and students. Moreover, the partnerships can contribute to the growth of understanding and cooperation in the region in general.

Above all, we see ourselves as a part of the European educational, professional, and scientific and research area, and strive to build capacities, improve and develop our study programmes and LLL courses, strengthening our position in the domestic and international HE environment through further collaboration with HE and scientific institutions, with industry and the community. These are our main strategic objectives.

In the selection of partner institutions we are focused on their competence to manage international projects and on study programmes they have. From our point of view, compatible study programmes offer opportunities for all kinds of student and staff mobility in the first cycle, (although we expect to extend it to the second and short cycles, as well), curriculum improvement or development, and possibly, joint degrees in the future, but firstly on the national level with a HEI of similar profile in relation to professional master degree in mechanical engineering. However, we are also ready to consider partnerships with those proposing complementary programmes. It is our intention to build efficient and quality partnerships for (re)designing our programmes, particularly in the professional master degree.

Consequently, we have established relations and signed bilateral agreements with some European higher education institutions. They are the Polytechnic University of Timisoara, (Romania), University of Applied Sciences in Karlovac (Croatia), and Technical University in Zvolen (Slovakia). An agreement on student mobility has been signed with the Technical University in Zvolen and we prepare joint conferences and projects with them.

Although our primary goal is to widen our connections with the HEIs from the region and the EU member states, the VTSNS has also developed a close collaboration with the Civil Defence Academy, Moscow, and St. Petersburg University of State Fire Service of EMERCOM of the Russian Federation dealing with civil protection in emergency situations, and Macon State College, now Middle Georgia State College, Georgia, USA, in the IT sector. Our cooperation agreements are based on shared academic interests, student and staff mobility and distance learning.

We have participated in national and international projects, having scientific, research or educational character that support student and faculty exchange, like the ones from Tempus and Erasmus programmes. Since the VTSNS and its management are dedicated to all forms of international cooperation, the actions of the Erasmus+ programme are strongly supported. Currently, the VTSNS is a partner at two Erasmus+ projects with EU institutions from Greece, Slovenia, Check Republic, Sweden, Denmark, Slovakia and the Western Balkans countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia.

Moreover, the VTSNS is a member of the Conference of Academies of Applied Studies Serbia (CAASS), and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The organisations deal with issues in professional HE on the national and wider level, outlining its prospective through intensive contacts of member institutions and project activities.

We are well aware that only through the exchange of people, ideas, results, and mutual work in a balanced but competitive cooperation of a diverse international environment, it is possible to contribute and benefit at the same time. Our intention is to broaden the scope of collaboration within old and new partnerships, in order to introduce a variety of novelties in our academic and administrative practices and organizational structure, scientific and research activities, ties with industry and modalities of mobility.

Therefore, international cooperation on projects, regardless of whether they result from bilateral agreements or specialized programmes like Erasmus+, is a crucial component of the institutional policy. The VTSNS encourages participation of both students and staff in such projects. The calls for project proposals are closely monitored, and potential partners are contacted well in advance. International cooperation projects are not just a way of presenting and comparing the institution in a broader context, they are a tool of its comprehensive development. Our strategy for the organisation and implementation of international cooperation projects is based on the steps aiming to:

- Expand international activities through contacts within the CAASS and EURASHE;
- Make a selection of strategic partners;
- Establish a developed system of financial support (grants) for participants of international activities, particularly students;
- Further motivate internationally active staff members by recognizing their achievements;
- Broaden the thematic scope of international cooperation activities so that different departments of the VTSNS can find their interest in participating;
- Diversify international project activities by paying more attention to mobility, master studies and trainings for professionals from public and private entities;
- Facilitate student international traineeship mobility through consortia between HEIs and businesses.

The VTSNS is located in Serbia which has started the process of joining the EU, so we are acquainted with the activities concerning the renewed EU Agenda for higher education. Furthermore, being a member of the CAASS which is now represented in the EURASHE Board by the Director of the VTSNS, our institution is informed at first hand about the trends in European HE and priorities set by the EU, such as the efforts to build a European Education Area based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth.

Since the Erasmus+ Programme is an instrument for achieving the goals mentioned above, we believe our participation in it will have a positive impact on the institution. The expected benefits comprise the following:

- Modernized curricula built on project-based surveys and analyses and EU experiences adjusted to the needs of the industry and labour market;
- Improving the quality of skills our students acquire, not just the professional ones, but also basic (e.g. digital) and transversal, like problem-solving;
- Strengthened capacity of the institution by investment in its equipment and facilities (particularly labs);
- Further development of international student, staff and research mobility in the region and beyond;
- Establishing collaboration with relevant domestic and foreign research institutions and businesses through consortia with HEIs;
- Enhancing innovation in cooperation with industry.

Our major policy objective is to raise the quality standards in all segments of performance on the institutional and individual levels alike.

It should be mentioned that the VTSNS is situated in the city of Novi Sad, the European Youth Capital 2019 and the European Capital of Culture 2021. It is the economic and political centre of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, a multinational community where people have learned to respect differences and live together, not side by side. This attitude reflects the policy of the VTSNS, as well.

In Novi Sad, on 17 March 2018