

Europe's Erasmus founder Sofia Corradi dies, aged 91



Students work in a library at the Roma Tre university in Rome. (Photo by TIZIANA FABRI / AFP)

Sofia Corradi, the creator of the EU's Erasmus program which has sent millions of young people abroad throughout Europe to study, died in Rome aged 91, Italian media reported Saturday.

Her family, who announced her death according to media reports, described the academic as a woman "of great energy and intellectual and emotional generosity".

The professor of education at Rome's Roma 3 University, Corradi - known as "Mamma Erasmus" -- in her 20s won a prestigious US Fulbright scholarship, which took her to Columbia University in New York where she received a master's degree in law.

When Corradi's exams were not subsequently recognised by the Italian educational system upon her return, she began envisioning the idea of an exchange programme, which she finally launched in 1987.

Some 16 million students have participated in the project since then, according to the Erasmus website.

The programme, which is managed by the European Union, promotes closer cooperation between universities and higher education institutions across Europe.

Corradi said in 2018 that the idea of the programme, born during the Cold War, was "my personal pacifist mission".

The Rome-born educator conducted research on the right to education for the United Nations' Human Rights Commission, The Hague Academy of International Law, and the London School of Economics.

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Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani wrote that Corradi "inspired the lives of millions of young people who have travelled, studied, and embraced different cultures", crediting her with "the birth of Generation Europe".

France's minister delegate for European Affairs, Benjamin Haddad, wrote on social media that "generations of young Europeans owe her a debt of gratitude".