

# SOFIA CORRADI



## THE MOTHER OF ERASMUS

Sofia Corradi (born 1934) is an Italian academic and educational reformer best known as the visionary behind the Erasmus programme. After studying in the United States on a scholarship in the 1950s, she returned to Italy hoping that her academic credits would be recognized by her university. They were not.

This personal frustration became the starting point of a lifelong mission: to make student mobility across Europe officially recognized and institutionally supported.

## From Idea to European Policy

In the 1960s and 1970s, Corradi began advocating for a European system that would allow students to study abroad without losing academic progress. At a time when European cooperation in higher education was limited, her proposal was considered unrealistic.

She spent decades lobbying universities, policymakers, and European institutions. Finally, in 1987, the Erasmus programme was launched by the European Community. What began as an educational reform became one of the most successful and symbolic projects of European integration.

Since its creation, Erasmus has allowed millions of young people to study, work, and train in other European countries.

## Education as European Integration

Corradi believed that mobility was not only about academic exchange, but about building European identity. By living and studying abroad, students would develop intercultural understanding, tolerance, and solidarity across borders.

Her vision contributed to reshaping Europe from a purely economic project into a social and cultural one – rooted in shared experiences rather than only treaties.



## Interesting Facts

- Sofia Corradi was awarded the title “Mother of Erasmus” by the European Parliament.
- She has received numerous honorary doctorates across Europe for her contribution to education.
- She continued teaching and advocating for student mobility well into her 80s.
- The Erasmus programme later expanded into Erasmus+, supporting not only students but also apprentices, youth workers, teachers, and NGOs.
- Today, Erasmus is one of the most popular and recognizable EU initiatives.

### Why Sofia Corradi Matters Today

Sofia Corradi matters because she understood that mobility builds empathy — and empathy builds peace. Her work shows how education can shape not only careers, but also identity and democratic values. By creating opportunities for young people to study across borders, she helped turn European integration into a lived experience rather than just a political idea.

In a Europe facing polarization and debates about migration and belonging, Erasmus remains a powerful symbol of openness and shared opportunity. Corradi demonstrated that cooperation grows through real human encounters, not only through institutions. By investing in youth mobility, she strengthened intercultural understanding, civic responsibility, and a sense of European solidarity.

Her story proves that lasting change can begin with one individual challenging an unfair system — and having the persistence to transform it into continental reform.

