

EUA response to Consultation on funding on EU External Actions

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A - Introduction/summary

The following provides a statement of the European University Association on the EU External Actions consultation. The on-line questionnaire has been considered, but in view of the field activity of EUA and its members, it was regarded as more appropriate to express some issues in this statement than to fill in the entire questionnaire, where other stakeholder organisations would be more competent.

The main point that EUA would like to make is that for practically all areas covered by the EC's external actions, universities are in the position to provide research based knowledge and expertise, and tend to operate in networks and with partners around the globe. Thus, higher education, and more specifically universities are well placed to contribute to the ECs external action. Given the strategic importance of higher education in both economic development and diplomacy, we believe there is a role for the European Union and the new EEAS in both enhancing the global visibility of European higher education and responding to international interest in European higher education.

B - The European University Association (EUA)

The European University Association (EUA) represents 34 national rectors' conferences and more than 800 universities and other research-intensive higher education institutions from 46 European countries. EUA's aim is to strengthen the convergence of Europe's higher education and research policy frameworks, and their global articulation and recognition. Since its conception, EUA has contributed actively to policy development, both as a member of the Bologna Process and in the discussion on the Lisbon Agenda and the European Research Area. It has also sought ways of enhancing the visibility, recognition and understanding of European higher education globally, through dialogue, partnership and cooperation, involving a wide range of European and international partners.

EUA works actively with its sister organisations in other parts of the world, such as North-America, South-America, Asia and Africa and contributes to bi-regional dialogue promoted by the EU and its Member States (EU-LAC, Africa-EU Partnership, ASEM Education Process, for example). **EUA also explores and advocates the role of universities in development cooperation** and actively participates in EuropeAid and Erasmus Mundus projects.

Through policy and project work EUA advocates the following:

- In an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world, Europe needs to work together with other parts of the world to address global challenges such as sustainable development, energy, climate change, security and migration.
- A strategic way to address these challenges is through higher education partnerships. If they are structured efficiently and sustainably, partnerships can generate research and teaching capacity,

empowering universities as economic drivers and agents of knowledge transfer. Furthermore university partnerships are a strategic means to contribute to the overall capacity development of universities. Thus, there is also an important role for higher education in development.

- Higher education also contributes to enhancing political cooperation and effective multilateralism in a variety of critical fields, to ensure that all the Millennium Development Goals are met and to promote regional and continental integration.

C – General Principles: Higher Education and EU External Action

EUA believes that higher education should underpin EU external action in a variety of important ways, and the EU should:

1. Capitalise on European universities' international missions and their international connectivity

- a. In their missions for teaching and learning, research and innovation and service to society, universities have a wide scale of knowledge and skills in various disciplines. They also have capacity for transdisciplinary action and can work effectively and positively with civil society organisations and industry.
- b. Universities maintain contacts, networks, and partnerships around the globe that allow them to develop initiatives in relatively short time and with relatively low costs. Current international activities of universities range from research and teaching, innovation, to capacity building and entrepreneurial activities. Specialised networks and organizations such as EUA can provide effective platforms for cross-breeding these partnerships and enhancing their regional dimensions.
- c. The role of universities and university associations should thus be highlighted in the EC's external action portfolio: Higher education cooperation is considered to contribute to mutual understanding, foster multilevel exchange and cooperation, and generate long-lasting partnerships which render highly sustainable benefits to students, professionals, institutions, societies, economies and countries.

2. Valorise the role of higher education for development cooperation and capacity building

- a. In the age of knowledge economies and with regards to global challenges, higher education is an important element and even a precondition for the sustainable development of countries and societies
- b. Universities in many European countries have had decades of experience in development partnerships and capacity building. They often do this in a bi-lateral context, but have increasingly expressed interest to engage in joint European action. This can enhance impact, coordination, and also spread know-how and good practice. EUA believes that development cooperation and capacity building should remain one of the core activities of European higher education at international level.

3. Consider that higher education can render Europe more visible externally, both as a competitive provider of training and research and as a development actor

- a. Promoting the European Higher Education Area, both as a partner and a potential study destination, should be an integral part of EU external actions. Higher education cooperation is a strategic diplomatic instrument. Through student and staff exchanges, and capacity building projects for HE institutions, Europe's image as a high quality, socially responsible higher education and research provider can be reinforced and ties strengthened with third countries.

- b. Universities and national agencies are increasingly present in third countries to promote their study offer, provide education offshore, and facilitate research cooperation. EU Delegations can be pivotal in stimulating dialogue and coordination between these actors. They also have a role to play in promoting and explaining EC higher education programmes to potential beneficiaries. This is increasingly important as programmes such as Erasmus Mundus and the various bi-lateral HE programmes gain visibility and generate interest. Good practice has previously been established in some Asian countries where European Higher Education Fairs (EHEFs) were financed by AIDCO. The Delegations were pivotal in bringing together the important MS HE agencies on the ground to develop joint initiatives.
- c. Given the increased demand for information on European higher education (stimulated by the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area) and the opportunities it provides, the European Union has tremendous potential to enhance its visibility through education cooperation measures in third countries.
- d. As a European/global level association with an international mission, EUA is ready to contribute to this objective, and will continue to do so through international project work and policy dialogue.

D - Recommendations for External Action Funding

While the above explains the role of higher education in external affairs, EUA has several recommendations on how subsequent programmes can be shaped and financed to support this objective. Reference is made to the consultation questionnaire where appropriate.

- 1) *The EU should continue to support the role of higher education and higher education partnerships as a vehicle of European development policy.*
- 2) *The EU should maintain and expand the European added value by supporting higher education cooperation projects between European and developing country HE actors*
- 3) *The EU programmes related to HE should be simplified and streamlined under one logic across EC directorates, which should be coherent, accessible, and have clearly defined rationales, purposes and goals.*
- 4) *The EU should incentivise European universities to be development actors.*
- 5) *The EC should break down geographic confines of funding instruments.*
- 6) *The EC should consider that higher education development projects can have both immediate, but also long-term benefits that might be more difficult to trace.*
- 7) *The EC should enhance the international visibility and recognition of European higher education, through the EC's own apparatus (including the Delegations) and through funding support for appropriate initiatives and projects.*

The recommendations in detail

- 1) *Role of higher education and higher education partnerships in development cooperation*

University partnerships are a strategic means to contribute to the overall capacity development of education systems. **The EU should thus continue to support the role of higher education and higher**

education partnerships in European development policy. This would mirror the emphasis placed on higher education in the EU 2020 Strategy and anticipate the soon to be launched EU higher education internationalisation strategy. This commitment should not only be evident through the various external cooperation programmes the EC finances (ALFA, Edu-Link, Tempus, for example), but should be reflected at a broader strategic level, in conjunction with the bi-regional policy process that the EU supports.

In terms of where higher education falls as a priority (Question 2 of the questionnaire), EUA would not rank sectoral priorities for development cooperation, but rather stress that higher education and research underpin all of the priorities.

2) *Continue to maintain and expand the European added value by supporting higher education cooperation projects*

Current EC higher education cooperation instruments are crucial for stimulating cooperation and coordination across national higher education development actors. Many national cooperation agencies and individual universities have HE/research cooperation programmes with universities in the global South and the industrialised world, yet little knowledge of overlaps and potential good practice exists. EC cooperation programmes are the only existing funding source that could encourage national actors to develop joint activities.

Furthermore, there is great need for a sustainable information exchange and dialogue platform that could provide an umbrella for enhanced cooperation among the many ongoing initiatives driven by member states, donor agencies and individual higher education institutions. Such a platform could also foster exchange and mutual learning regarding regional integration projects in higher education and research. EUA and other regional associations could provide a valuable backbone. From a funding perspective and with regards to subsidiarity, the EC would be well placed to support this.

In addition, it is strongly recommended that the EU continue to develop international higher education partnerships schemes for universities, on basis of the lessons learnt from the current Third Country cooperation instruments. Such partnership project strands are needed in order to foster partnership among universities, their representative bodies, agencies and other relevant stakeholders. They also reinforce the European dimension of cooperation.

Partnership projects serve multiple purposes and are the basis for a wide range of activities, ranging from curriculum development to institutional capacity building. They could also be a strategic tool for developing joint research consortia for submission under future Framework Programme instruments (hence a research capacity building measure). The Framework Programmes are presently inaccessible for many universities in developing countries that would like to enhance research capacity.

EUA would like to reference the project White Paper of a recently funded EC Erasmus Mundus project for further elaboration on this concept: *Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for development: Meeting Regional and Global Challenge* (http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications/Africa-Europe_Higher_Education_Cooperation_White_Paper.sflb.ashx).

Furthermore, it is suggested that a wider range of funding possibilities and levels be considered for projects, depending on the actual needs of the projects, with grants ranging between 250.000 and 750.000 EUR as a general rule, but in exceptional cases also going beyond 1 Mill EUR. The length of funding should also be considered. Cooperation projects with developing countries may need a longer start-up period, and more time to ensure take-up and sustainability (a criticism of the Edulink programme). Ultimately

benefitting institutions should have a certain flexibility to request both the length and grant amount, within broad limitations.

3) *Simplify and streamline HE related programmes (in reference to question 8 of the consultation survey 'Simplification of Instruments')*

EUA recommends **streamlining all programmes for higher education under one highly visible, clearly defined and well structured logic** comprising the present Erasmus Mundus programme and the various relevant initiatives and instruments at regional and bilateral level with industrialised and developing countries (ALFA, Edu-Link, Tempus). This approach would be more conducive to reaching both EC development and higher education modernisation goals. It would simplify and streamline programme applications and management procedures, and allow for more flexibility on the side of beneficiaries.

The creation of a visible 'one stop shop' for higher education: a central point for information and an interface for applications for students and higher education institutions, but also for agencies and organisations from Europe and other parts of the world, is something that has been highly requested by EUA members and partners.

4) *Incentivise European universities to be development actors*

While higher education should be increasingly funded as a development action, funding instruments should be flexible enough to accommodate sustainable capacity building partnerships. **A solution needs to be found to ensure the participation of the European University community in development activities.** Higher education cooperation can only be meaningful if exchange is reciprocal. European universities have expressed concern about incentivising staff to take up development cooperation activities, e.g. for collaborative research and student and staff exchange. In this regard, restrictions regarding eligibility of costs incurred by European universities in DCI funded programmes are concerning. We strongly recommend that the DCI grant exceptions to, or otherwise find ways of providing better cost coverage for universities, university networks and associations in Europe.

5) *Break down geographic confines of funding instruments*

In reference to Question 5, EUA would strongly agree with the final point 'The EU should make the geographic limits of instruments more flexible to facilitate cross-regional/ continental cooperation (e.g. using different instruments to support, in certain countries, implementation of the joint Africa-EU Strategy or concerning the greater Caribbean cooperation)'.

It is crucial that programmes provide flexible funding opportunities for universities encouraging them to link diverse thematic and geographic areas, actions and actors in a creative, innovative and sustainable manner: Beyond its defined priorities, **programmes should respond better to the needs of higher education institutions and the way they work.** Universities' initiatives are often characterized by multilayered rationales, involving different actors and activities.

In this sense, new funding instruments should consider 'global programmes' that are not regionally bound. One current example of good practice would be an Erasmus Mundus Action 3 project that EUA coordinates entitled 'CODOC: Cooperation on Doctoral Education between Asia, Africa Latin America and Europe'. This

project looks at development in doctoral education provision in a cross-regional fashion and stresses the importance of building research capacity through North-South-South models. This counters the geographically based multi-annual programme logic, yet is extremely effective in bringing HE actors across developing regions together on a common topic.

- 6) Consider that higher education development projects can have both immediate, but also long-term benefits that might be more difficult to trace*

In reference to Question 14, 'Performance evaluation', EUA would encourage that when measuring the outputs of development projects, the EC considers the potential long-term implications of impact assessment. Higher education development projects may create tangible tools in the immediate, such as joint curricula or research projects, but the long-term implications of partnership are often difficult to measure. Connecting higher education actors can generate slow changes processes that need to be evaluated over the long-term, with consideration for the effects of spin-off projects and network building. In this regard, projects that promote dialogue between HE actors should continue to be prioritized.

- 7) Enhance the international visibility and recognition of European higher education, through the EC's own apparatus (including the Delegations) and through funding support for appropriate initiatives and projects*

In the past decade, through the Bologna process and the Lisbon Agenda, the European Higher Education and Research Area has emerged. While it has received a fair share of attention and recognition, and is met with a lot of interest, it clearly needs further support that can only be provided at European level by the EC.

This is partly done already on the EEAS website, through the Erasmus Mundus programmes, and also through programmes that support bi-regional dialogue and cooperation of university consortia of both regions (Alfa, EduLink, Tempus, in the past Asia Link). These initiatives appear to be of mutual benefit, as they enhance exchange, lay ground for cooperation initiatives, and improve mutual understanding.

Therefore present initiatives should be continued and enhanced. The EC should consider the overall branding and user-accessibility of such programmes, and ensure that they reflect the EU strategy for the Internationalisation of higher education that the Council has asked the EC to develop.

The EC may consider a more structured approach to providing information on the European Higher Education Area, which could be the role of a Delegation or a relevant local agency or organisation. This should be done in conjunction with MS agencies and organisations that are already in third countries promoting higher education or their respective countries.