



THE ALEXANDRIA DECLARATION

Following the Barcelona Declaration and especially since the Barcelona+10 Summit, the member states of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Commission have repeatedly - and most recently in the Catania Declaration of January 29, 2006 - emphasized the need for exchanges of researchers and members of the academic community between all the institutions of higher education of the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Over the centuries some of the greatest contributions to civilization have been made in the past all along the coasts of the Mediterranean sea, and the Universities of the Euro-Mediterranean region wish to ensure that this contribution will continue into the future.

The growing importance of communication and academic exchanges in the Mediterranean region in order to create a common area of shared well-being is fully acknowledged: this communication has never been broken since universities were first founded.

These exchanges originated with the conviction of belonging to the same academic community unfettered by borders, be they physical or intellectual. However, the unequal development of societies has often meant the isolation of academic life, breaking the principle of universality, which is so deeply rooted in the academic community.

Likewise, conflicts, wars, simplifying and radical thought, as well as the fear of the other, have distanced academic communities from each other, in terms of both their academic discourse and in scientific debate.

The harmonious development of the two shores of the Mediterranean can be seen through the convergence of university systems. Modern structures, the spread of systems of quality control, a balance between programmes offered and the needs of civil society and labour markets, the development of intellectual freedom and creative processes, are the key elements for the development of free, harmonious societies.

A free and egalitarian society can develop in the Mediterranean, provided universities are fully involved in the process of construction of this modernity and system of liberties.

The members of all academic communities share a system of values that greatly enhances a straightforward and egalitarian dialogue, without discrimination of sex, race and religion, and that ensures that societies that know how to use it, achieve rapid and harmonious social development.

Academics in Europe and in the Mediterranean Partner Countries area acknowledge that they are all members of the same community, thus breaking the stereotypes that other social systems have built up over the centuries.

As stated in the principles of the Tarragona (2005) and Tampere (2006) Declarations, these positive elements that allow universities to play their role as important agents of stability and peace in the Mediterranean are sometimes destroyed by political structures and the limits that their systems impose.

It is laudable - indeed exemplary – that both the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Commission have held that mobility between the members of the academic communities would in itself encourage the setting-up of comparable Euro-Mediterranean academic systems.

This vision is certainly the outcome of a successful experience -the Erasmus university exchange programme- which has made a great contribution to Europe. This programme not only made an impact on the scientific community, but also in developing shared values among youth and societies right across Europe. It is worth recalling, however, that the situation of Euro-Mediterranean universities is not even comparable to the situation, in 1987, of the European universities, when the Erasmus programme came into being.

Programmes recently put into practice by the European Union, such as the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, will doubtless allow thousands of youngsters to benefit from experience in other societies. However, in spite of this big step forward, mobility programmes in the Euro-Mediterranean area cannot ensure the progress of the societies that maintain their academic systems. It is important that governments take measures to create incentives that reduce the risk of a brain drain toward countries where technological and scientific development is more advanced, thus depriving less-developed systems.

The objective must be therefore the construction of a higher education area covering all academic communities of the Mediterranean.

To successfully establish this new space a thorough and transparent understanding of all academic systems and their relation with society is needed. This knowledge is essential before completely horizontal systems of quality assurance can become

feasible. Only when these standards are in place will it become possible to accredit degrees, credits, study plans and, thus, student exchanges at equal levels.

In this context, on behalf of the Universities, Networks and Institutions attending the IV Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Universities in Alexandria, the EuroMed Permanent University Forum (EPUF) submits the following recommendations arising out of the work done on June 11 and 12 2007 to the First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research in Cairo, June 18, 2007:

1. To consolidate the European Union exchange programmes such as the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, while asking the state members to facilitate the participation of their universities to this sort of programmes. EPUF also asks the European Commission for the opportunity to discuss with its representatives ways of improving some aspects of these exchange programmes.
2. To contribute to the drafting of a Euromed universities White Paper affording in-depth knowledge of the situation of these institutions in regard to the application of the systems of the Bologna Process and the application of the principles laid down in the Declaration of Tarragona.
3. To adopt systems aimed at simplifying visa issue procedures, for the academic activities of University researchers, teachers, students and administrative staff.
4. To support academic work undertaken by young researchers in the Euro-Mediterranean region, especially by setting up specific programmes in Mediterranean partner countries for their own young researchers working in partnership with colleagues from other Euro-Mediterranean countries.
5. To increase support for University initiatives aiming to create synergy with civil society. To this end, initiatives taken by the Anna Lindh Foundation deserve support and encouragement.
6. To welcome the Slovene initiative to set up a Euro-Mediterranean University in Piran, devoted to postgraduate studies on the Mediterranean and its societies and, if appropriate, to support it. The EPUF support this initiative and invite the ministers to encourage similar actions such as collaborative programmes with universities in other parts of the Mediterranean area.
7. To propose to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership the setting up, together with EPUF, of a joint committee in order to follow up the below-presented proposals.

Alexandria, June 12, 2007

FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROMED HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Credit accreditation

We propose the adoption of the "European Credit Transfer System" by the universities of the states who have yet to adopt it (on either side of the Euro-Mediterranean), with the objective of unifying and establishing the equivalence criteria between the different study plans of the entire region.

Degree accreditation

We propose the promotion of a convention similar to the Hague Convention (Convention Abolishing the Requirement of Legalisation for Foreign Public Documents, 1961) but which should include all the Euro-Mediterranean countries, as an act of absolute priority for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Seal.

In order to ensure the degree accreditation and therefore its further validity on the labour market, we propose the establishment of the diploma supplement. The accreditation of the degree should not overlook the accreditation of the profession in order to guarantee the job placements of the degree-holders all throughout the Euro-Mediterranean.

Double degree. Bilateral agreements

Given that nowadays it is impossible to create double-degree study programmes between northern and southern Mediterranean universities, we ask the support of the Ministers with regards to the proposal of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, to set the grounds for the creation of concrete bilateral agreements, which would facilitate this sort of studies. This would be a first step towards the unification of the different educational systems of the region.

We also propose the promotion of an Erasmus University Charter for southern Mediterranean universities, and its inclusion as a requirement to participate in European programmes.

The capacity of attraction of northern universities

Through European programmes such as the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window or the 7th Framework Programme, we ask the Ministers to support the promotion of research, always that this is linked to a period of study (as it is the case of students) or of co-tutoring (the case of teachers) in the host university or study centre.

We trust that the Ministers will also keep in mind the possibilities of mobility of the administrative staff.

The capacity of attraction of southern universities

We ask the support of the Ministers in establishing direct relationships between universities and institutions of cultural promotion overseas, so as to allow using the structures of the cultural institutions of the state members.

Multilingual systems

Along with the administrative procedures of the EPUF (EuroMed Permanent University Forum) with the Arab League and especially with the ALECSO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization) and AARU (Association of Arab Universities), we ask the support of the Ministers to promote the opportunities of study of the Arab language in European countries; to give an impulse to the development of modern and attractive methods of study.

Given that we all understand the importance of knowing a foreign language nowadays, in order to allow one opportunities for the future, on a personal, academic and work level, we ask the Ministers to promote and give an impulse to foreign language learning systems, on both sides of the Mediterranean, for all students.

Reception

We ask the Ministers to promote agreements between governments in order to exempt students who have a scholarship of the obligation to have a certain quantity of money deposited in the bank.

We also ask the Ministers to support the Rectors in their efforts to give an impulse to initiatives among student associations (holders of EU grants or not) in order to promote the idea of an accompanying student for the foreign student, inside the host university.

In this respect, and with the purpose of promoting good relationships between students, we propose the Ministers to support any attempt of the European Association of Erasmus-ESIB Students to widen their collaboration with associations from the Euro-Mediterranean.

Returning-home problems of graduate students and researchers

We ask the Ministers to look for and to apply efficient methods so that students and researchers studying abroad can (and want to) return to their country of origin without seeing their professional opportunities diminished.

We, therefore, urge the governments and the universities to make efforts in the creation of employment offices, offering them the necessary equipment, as well as reaching agreements between universities and companies.

Non-academic staff mobility and training

We propose the Ministers to give more support and to allocate more resources to the EU Tempus Programme, in what concerns non-academic staff training, so that universities can promote the mobility of their own personnel, helping it with more financial aids and work facilities.

We also propose that measures be taken, where needed, in order to guarantee the acknowledgement of internships and the experience acquired during the mobility period (including, if the case, the virtual mobility).

Quality systems

We propose the Ministers to encourage direct contacts between state agencies, and if the case, regional agencies, as well as on a European level with the ENQA, with the purpose of involving their activities in the work that EPUF is currently carrying out.

The Forum asks the support of the Ministers in promoting, with the help of northern and southern universities, the constitution of a Euro-Mediterranean Quality Agency, EMNQA.

Speeding-up the visa procedures

In order to ensure a dignified treatment of people working for universities, we ask the support of the Ministers in elaborating a common official form, recognized by all the Euro-Mediterranean states, bearing the logo of the EU and each member state, which could speed up the visa procedures, and which should be presented together with the visa application form, including the names of the involved universities.

EPUF asks the support of the Ministers in its collaboration with the different Foreign Affairs Ministries, so that the technical cooperation offices located in the southern Mediterranean countries watch over the fast granting of visas for students, academic and administrative staff of southern universities. We, therefore, ask for the same procedures to be applied as it is currently the case of experts from the South collaborating with NGOs from the North. This process could easily be transferred to the university environment. All this without interfering in the possible EPUF-EU negotiations which are meant to ensure that the EU delegations in the different countries facilitate the information related to the visa granting procedures and the means to speed up the process.

Grant and part-time jobs systems

We ask the Ministers to exchange experience in promoting student training grants, offered both by universities and companies, so that the direct integration of the student on the labour market becomes easier, especially before the end of the studies.

Virtual Mobility

The EPUF invites the Ministers to acknowledge the growing role that new technologies have in distance education and e-Learning, as an essential complement to on-site teaching, in the framework of the setting up of the Euromed Virtual Community.

EPUF urges also their support for the integration of virtual mobility into the European exchange programmes as it is the case of the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, a fundamental activity for the promotion of knowledge in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. Virtual mobility addresses to students, to researchers and to academic and non-academic staff.