

Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the internationalisation ⁽¹⁾ of higher education

(2010/C 135/04)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

WHEREAS:

1. The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 established an intergovernmental process aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area by 2010 which is actively supported by the European Union, and the Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 participating countries, meeting in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve on 28 and 29 April 2009, called for higher education institutions to further internationalise their activities.
2. The Council Resolution of 23 November 2007 on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy ⁽²⁾ invited Member States to promote the internationalisation of higher education institutions by encouraging quality assurance through independent evaluation and peer review of universities, enhancing mobility, promoting the use of joint and double degrees and facilitating the recognition of qualifications and periods of study.
3. The European Union has a long tradition of cooperation with third countries based on a set of policies and instruments in which higher education is playing an increasing role. Cooperation agreements with partners around the world often include support for infrastructure and cooperation programmes in higher education, as well as frameworks for policy dialogues in this field. Cooperation in higher education also features prominently in multilateral cooperation frameworks such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the Northern Dimension or the Eastern Partnership.
4. Decision No 1298/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 established the *Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013* action programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries ⁽³⁾.
5. The *Tempus IV* programme (2007-2013) supports the modernisation of higher education in the partner countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region, mainly through university cooperation projects and partnerships. Other programmes, such as the cooperation programmes with industrialised countries, or *EduLink*, *Nyerere* and *Alfa*, cover academic cooperation activities with other regions of the world.

6. The *Marie Curie* actions under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development promote excellence and mobility in European research and provide broad support for the development of dynamic world-class human resources in the European research system, taking into account the inherent international dimension of research,

NOTING THAT:

1. Higher education is acquiring an increasingly international dimension, as more and more higher education institutions enrol students from third countries, exchange students, staff, projects and knowledge, and engage in international academic and research cooperation.
2. The quality of Europe's higher education institutions and the unparalleled range and depth of studies they offer make those institutions highly attractive to the international academic world, both as study destinations and as partners for joint education and research ventures.
3. In addition, Europe's success in creating tools such as the common reference framework that relates national qualifications systems and frameworks together around a common European reference ⁽⁴⁾, and in developing a common understanding in areas such as quality assurance ⁽⁵⁾, is generating increasing interest among global partners.
4. International cooperation programmes and policy dialogues with third countries in the field of higher education not only enable knowledge to flow more freely, but also contribute to enhancing the quality and international standing of European higher education, to boosting research and innovation, to fostering mobility and intercultural dialogue, as well as to promoting international development in accordance with EU external policy objectives,

RECALLING THAT:

The Council attaches great importance to promoting learning mobility in higher education for students, teaching staff and researchers. Such mobility provides a means of enriching human capital and strengthening employability through the acquisition and exchange of knowledge, the development of linguistic and intercultural competences, and the promotion of interpersonal contacts. Moreover, increasing the flow of knowledge in this way can enhance the capacity for creativity and innovation,

⁽¹⁾ For the purposes of this text, the term 'internationalisation' is used to refer to the development of international cooperation activities between EU higher education institutions and those in third countries.

⁽²⁾ 16096/1/07 REV 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 340, 19.12.2008, p. 83.

⁽⁴⁾ The European Qualifications Framework (OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1).

⁽⁵⁾ e.g. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, each established under the Bologna Process.

NEVERTHELESS AWARE THAT:

The global competition to secure ever larger shares of the mobile international student population is increasingly challenging, with other world partners also actively pursuing strategies to promote the opening up of their higher education institutions to the wider world and to attract the best talents.

AGREES THAT:

1. International cooperation in higher education is an important and rewarding area which deserves support at both national and EU level. Such cooperation contributes to improving the quality and innovation of teaching, learning and research, and is beneficial to the production of knowledge. Higher education plays a central role in the development of individuals and societies, as it enhances social, cultural and economic development and promotes active citizenship and ethical values. While having special regard for the principle of subsidiarity, cooperation in higher education should therefore form an integral part of the EU's external cooperation policies, and should be adapted to the particular needs, interests and state of development of the partner countries concerned.
2. Support is needed for EU initiatives and programmes which promote higher education cooperation with a European dimension, and which support higher education institutions in working on joint academic projects, in reinforcing European networks and thus in reducing barriers between national systems. Supporting European higher education institutions in cooperating with their global peers plays an important role in promoting quality and excellence. Cooperation of this kind has, for instance, contributed to the creation of innovative courses and opened the way to the establishment of transnational joint, double and multiple degrees. EU academic cooperation programmes should be organised in such a way that they develop highly visible and efficient delivery mechanisms and convey clear, consistent and convincing messages throughout the world.
3. The progress achieved in making the degree structure more compatible and more comparable through the pan-European Bologna process, as well as the EU's success in adopting common approaches and tools with regard to the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance, have enhanced the attractiveness of higher education within the Union. There is a shared interest in promoting these developments worldwide and in responding to the rising interest which third countries are demonstrating. The Bologna Policy Forum which facilitates policy dialogue between the European Higher Education Area and other parts of the world should be welcomed as a tool for exchange on concrete issues of mutual interest.
4. Initiatives which make European higher education more understandable and transparent to international stakeholders can also help to make Europe more attractive as a study destination. The ongoing study aimed at mapping the

diversity of higher education institutions' missions and performances and at assessing the feasibility of a European transparency instrument should be continued with a view to improving readability and lending greater visibility to the particular strengths of European higher education.

5. A growing number of third countries are interested in the common policies and instruments developed by the EU to support Member States in modernising their different education systems, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) being amongst those that have attracted particular attention. This is why, in addition to international academic cooperation programmes, policy dialogue in higher education should be further developed with a number of interested world partners, with a view to sharing experience and good practice, building up local capacities and using positive feedback to improve EU policies.
6. International academic cooperation should continue to be an important means for the EU to support the modernisation efforts of its partners, since by offering structured partnerships between higher education institutions from the EU and third countries, the EU can contribute to building local capacities — both within and beyond higher education institutions — retain qualified university staff, and enhance international academic exchanges and mobility,

ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

Adopt, in coordination with higher education institutions and while recognising their autonomy and national practices, measures which are aimed at:

1. Fostering a truly international culture within those institutions, for instance by:
 - (a) promoting cooperation, networking and interaction between higher education institutions, the research world and the business sector at international level, as part of the drive towards a fully functioning knowledge triangle;
 - (b) fostering and supporting the mobility of international students, teachers, researchers and other staff;
 - (c) providing students, teachers, researchers and other stakeholders in higher education with the training and competences needed to work in an open international environment;
 - (d) recruiting internationally experienced staff who can encourage a more international outlook among native students and teaching staff;

- (e) ensuring the provision of high quality curricula and the application of teaching methods which take the international dimension into account;
 - (f) establishing an institutional environment which encourages the participation of students, teaching staff and researchers in international programmes, joint, double and multiple degrees, and research projects;
 - (g) encouraging higher education institutions to develop internationalisation strategies, and/or to include this dimension in their development plans.
2. Increasing the international attractiveness of higher education institutions, for instance by:
- (a) promoting the academic excellence of European campuses, and improving their international visibility as interesting places to study and conduct research;
 - (b) improving the quality of services supporting the reception, stay and return of international students, teaching staff, researchers and other staff;
 - (c) participating in international cooperation networks, projects and joint education and research programmes;
 - (d) promoting the development of high quality joint, double and multiple degrees, as well as the joint monitoring of theses;
 - (e) facilitating, whilst having due regard to quality assurance mechanisms, the recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad.
3. Promoting the global dimension and awareness of the social responsibility of higher education institutions, for instance by:
- (a) promoting new and innovative forms of transnational cooperation within the higher education community;
 - (b) fostering and improving equity in access to higher education and international mobility schemes through the provision of adequate incentives and support;
 - (c) returning knowledge to society at both the local, national and global level, thereby helping to meet society's needs and important social challenges,
- ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:
1. Develop, in collaboration with the Member States and while fully respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions, an EU international higher education strategy which is aimed at improving coherence and complementarity between existing international cooperation initiatives at both EU and national level, and which will continue to promote the attractiveness of European higher education, research and innovation in the EU's external activities, as well as EU cooperation programmes and policies in this field.
 2. Ensure that learning and research mobility between the EU and the wider world forms part of that strategy.
 3. Continue to support international higher education partnerships, international academic cooperation and capacity-building actions, and to facilitate policy dialogue in higher education with interested third countries.
 4. Promote the exchange of experience and good practice in this field.
-