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ETUCE Statement on

Public Consultation on the future EU Programme for International Cooperation in Higher Education and Human Capital Development

The ETUCE would like to highlight its views on the public consultation on the future EU Programme for International Cooperation in Higher Education and Human Capital Development.

Introduction

The ETUCE welcomes the efforts of the European Union to stimulate cooperation in higher education in Europe and globally. These efforts are legitimate in the framework of the Lisbon Treaty and form an important part of Europe's 2020 Strategy. In this light, the ETUCE recognises the European Commission as a constructive partner in the Bologna Process and in other forums for cooperation in higher education. These actions are to the benefit of us all, as students and staff in higher education, as well as the wider society have much to gain from a strong European dimension in teaching, researching and learning.

In this respect, the Erasmus Mundus programme has been a noteworthy policy tool. With a budget of nearly € 1 billion in the period 2009-2013, the programme has led to interesting students' exchanges and has allowed global partnerships between higher education institutions, research organisations and stakeholders to flourish. The number of applicants for the highly prized scholarships and study-places in the programme as well as student evaluations clearly indicate that the programme has been a success.¹ The ETUCE notes that the availability of scholarships for students from EU countries, as well as increased funding for projects for stakeholder projects has increased the effectiveness of the programme. Other noteworthy programmes² are of course the Tempus IV programme for modernisation of higher education in partner countries, the Marie Curie actions under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development or the more recent partnership programmes with other regions of the world. We believe therefore that a future programme for the period post-2013 can build on these successes.

This paper lays out our vision for a European programme for international cooperation in higher education. The paper starts from the assumption that the success of the Erasmus

¹ It should be noted however that the ETUCE has been more critical of the third strand of the programme, as it does not consider it necessary for Europe to effectively 'brand' higher education in the rest of the world or to fund more effective exchanges between higher education and industry. Indeed, high quality study programmes advertise themselves, on the basis of academic values and excellence as well as the availability of decent scholarships and support.

² Here we only note the programmes falling outside the scope of the Lifelong Learning Programme, or particularly for higher education, the Erasmus scheme.

Mundus Programme should provide lessons for a future integrated strategy for international cooperation in higher education. We would like to point to the *strategic priorities* for the European Union, *the type of projects to be funded* and finally, to *the Commission's role* towards partner countries and the stakeholders governing higher education.

We would emphasise the overall international character of higher education and of research in particular. International cooperation is not a new development in our sector, and researchers has always been collaborating at the international level as well as competing to be first with new findings of their research and to get them published before others and present them at international scientific conferences. The new development is an international competition for money – including for fee-paying students. The system has thus moved from an academic competition to an economic competition and that is risking to be harmful to HE and research in general, and distorting its purposes, because it is leading to more closed environments where one rather strive to protect one's ideas and findings instead of publish them or share them. An open academic debate is a basic prerequisite to the development of research and this is the basis for research based teaching in higher education.

Strategic Priorities for 2020 in a Global Context

The strategic priorities for international higher education can be derived in a straightforward manner from the Europe 2020 strategic, the Council conclusions from 12 May 2009 on 'A strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training' and the Council conclusions from 11 May 2010 'On the internationalisation of higher education'. The latter document outlines the agenda for an 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.'* Quite rightly, the document also outlines the importance of learning and research mobility, international higher education partnerships, international academic cooperation and capacity-building actions, policy dialogue, and the exchange of good practices as important elements for such a strategy. Moreover, the document rightly emphasizes the importance of the Bologna Process in shaping European priorities for higher education. The ETUCE strongly believes that higher education and research are public goods: this principle, and the principle of academic freedom, requires that higher education and research must be protected from corporate or market based models, and those who would prioritise an economic or labour market role for universities. Higher education and research fulfils a diverse range of purposes including personal development, the transmission and interpretation of knowledge, and social cohesion and well-being, and alongside these purposes, it is a key generator of skilled labour for the economy.'

For the ETUCE, a starting point for an international agenda is UNESCO's work to deal with global problems in higher education. The recent World Conference on Higher Education in

July 2009 has aimed to shape an international agenda for higher education³. Europe, having a long tradition of cooperation in higher education, has an important responsibility for this agenda⁴. Following the notions of sustainability and development, which are pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy, the strategy for international cooperation in higher education could play an important role in promoting higher education as *an agenda for human development*.

In this context, the ETUCE would like to assert that the European strategy for international cooperation in higher education should not only reflect (Western) European needs, but should take note of local problems in partner countries, in a context of international tensions and processes affecting higher education. We believe that at least the following six problems should be reflected upon in the strategy:

- (1) Structural inequalities in access to education as for example addressed by the 'Education for All' agenda and the Millennium Development Goals;
- (2) Structural problems in the academic profession (e.g. low attractiveness, bad working conditions, lack of career opportunities) that strongly impact on the quality of education;
- (3) The related need for higher education capacity development in the EU's neighbours and beyond;
- (4) The destructive forces of the global market for higher education; and
- (5) The problem of 'brain drain'.
- (6) The need to resist threats to higher education and research as public goods

So far, in the view of the ETUCE, the European Commission has failed to reflect on these problems in a consistent way. After analysing the consultation documents, it seems that the EU seems more interested in marketing European higher education abroad and importing skilled labour than in capacity building and development of higher education in partner countries. This should be seen as a problem for the EU as a whole, as the problems mentioned above even affect the most of the newer EU Member States. The Bologna Process, while it has analysed many of the key issues, for example, mobility and social inclusivity and relations with other global regions, has failed to find the policies or the means to effect change.

³ We would like to refer in particular to the communiqué adopted at the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, available on http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf as well as Education International's Statement to the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education available on http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/20090705_EI-Statement-To-2nd-UNESCO-WCHE_en.pdf.

⁴ Please note that such a view is compatible with the notions of subsidiarity and university autonomy, as it would simply address shared coordination problems from a global perspective. Moreover, as will be mentioned later, the Member States and stakeholders themselves would have an important role to play in shaping this response.

In sum, we believe that a European strategy should feature a thorough understanding of global problems of development, and should refrain from shamelessly promoting European higher education abroad. The implication of the points made above is that an EU-wide international higher education agenda needs to be coordinated with the EU's development agenda, as well as with its recently established foreign policy structures. Moreover, it should evaluate its position on international trade in higher education, promoted in forums such as in the WTO's GATS negotiations.

Funding Priorities towards 2020

In our view, the following four priorities should be at the heart of any European strategy for higher education:

- (1) High quality student and staff exchanges;
- (2) Sustainable partnerships between higher education institutions;
- (3) Capacity development projects in partner countries based on local needs; and
- (4) Stakeholder partnerships that aim to critically assess the effects of higher education reform.

For the ETUCE, European higher education is given its shape in the academic exchanges of real people, in cooperation projects between staff that works in ministries or in higher education institutions and in open and critical deliberation about the success and failures of European cooperation by stakeholders. For the ETUCE, the Erasmus Mundus project has been a good example of combining these priorities, and a future programme therefore has a good basis to start from. The recipe for success is a combination of high scholarships, no fees, and ownership by the higher education community, combined with funding for partnership projects.

It should be made easier to fully fund these exchanges and projects for people and organisations from third countries. Indeed, Europe will contribute little to local needs if it only funds its European organisations and citizens. The ETUCE is aware of the complexities to fund exchanges of staff and researchers, but is ready to play a role in moving this issue forward.

In order to address these global problems, the European Commission should continue to establish strategic funding priorities for each budgetary cycle. The ETUCE would like to note that these funding priorities should be developed in a more inclusive process, allowing for more deliberation with the main stakeholders and social partners. As EU budgeting is by nature a sensitive process, it is important that the rules of consultation and debate are clearly established and that these follow completely transparent procedures. Yet, the Commission can play a more pro-active role in consulting stakeholder organisations on their views of the budgeting process by writing them to inform them of possible changes, and consulting them in advance of these changes.

The Role of the European Commission

It can be expected that the European Commission will continue to play an important role in shaping higher education in partner countries. As it attracts students and staff from partner countries or sets funding priorities for higher education reform, it plays the role of both a *facilitator* of exchange and an *expert* shaping reform. This is very visible in the Bologna Process, as the European Commission funds projects related to the Process, but also defines its own strategic goals and actions. In our experience, these two roles can come into conflict with each other if the Commission does not clearly separate them.

The ETUCE and many other stakeholders have felt in the past that the Commission often uses its funding mechanisms to mobilise actors to implement reforms, rather than to let them critically and independently assess the impact of changes. There is an inherent danger in this strategy as it could easily lead to absorption of critical voices, rather than to high quality public deliberation on alternative strategic priorities. A new programme for international cooperation in higher education should take note of this pitfall, and underline the importance of the European Commission as a partner, rather than an agent in reforming higher education.

Conclusion

In our view, the new international strategy for higher education should aim to address the needs of partner countries, rather than to simply market European higher education abroad. We believe that the strategy could be an important contribution to the global dimension of higher education, in a context of human development. The strategy should therefore aim to fund student and staff exchanges, partnerships between higher education institutions, capacity development projects and stakeholder partnerships.

Europe has a long track record of cooperation with its neighbours and has the capacity to understand their local needs. Ultimately, it lies upon a realisation that addressing the needs of higher education in partner countries today is in the interest of European higher education tomorrow.

We would like to thank the European Commission for the opportunity to submit our views in the consultation process.

The ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education is the European Region of Education International. It represents 135 teachers' unions in Europe and 12.8 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. The ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at EU level and an Industry Federation within the ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation.