

INFORMAL MEETING OF EU-CELAC MINISTERS AND HIGH AUTHORITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Santiago de Compostela, may 5, 2023

DECLARATION - INFORMAL MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE COMMUNITY OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES (EU-CELAC)

Santiago de Compostela, May 5, 2023

Cooperation in higher education in the EU-CELAC framework has been always present, in the bi-regional Summits of Heads of State and Government. The importance of education for achieving social equality and scientific and technological progress was already declared at the 1st EU-LAC Summit, that was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1999. This vocation was materialized at the 2nd EU-LAC Summit, which took place in May 2002 in Madrid, within the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The Declaration adopted at that time in the Spanish capital became the starting point for the creation of the bi-regional higher education area, by recommending the development, approval and promotion of the 2002-2004 Action Plan to build a Common Area of Higher Education between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. This recommendation was based on a proposal developed at the Conference of Ministers of Education of the European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean held in Paris in 2000.

Within the framework of the 3rd EU-LAC Summit in 2004, the declaring States agreed to extend until 2008 the 2002-2004 Action Plan to build a Common Area of Higher Education between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union. By doing this, they sought to extend the 2002 mandate for the achievement of the Common Area of Higher Education as a cornerstone in the improvement of inclusion and quality in higher education.

In 2006, the city of Vienna hosted the 4th EU-LAC Summit, at which the declaring states explicitly gave priority to the creation of the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education, oriented towards mobility and cooperation. This emphasized the idea of both regions as a geographical area for exchanges in education.

The 5th EU-LAC Summit organized in Lima in 2008 maintained higher education as an area where it was necessary to improve and extend its coverage and quality. This area of action was reinforced by the Message from the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly during that same summit, which identified higher education as an area to be strengthened.

In 2010, this dimension granted new momentum to the EU-LAC strategic partnership with the celebration of the 6th EU-LAC Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Madrid on May 18, 2010. This Summit provided the backdrop for the promotion of cooperation in science, technology and innovation. This gave continuity to the efforts previously reflected in the agreement to develop and to implement the Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation, which had been adopted by the EU-LAC Ministerial Forum on Science and Technology held in Madrid on May 14, 2010.

The 6th EU-LAC Summit included, among its major achievements and as a sign of a non-negotiable commitment to education, the creation of the EU-LAC Foundation. This foundation,

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which became an international organization on May 17, 2019, was conceived as a useful instrument to strengthen the bi-regional partnership and as a vehicle to stimulate debate on common strategies and actions. The result of its work is the "Matrix of Objectives and Strategic Lines for the Construction of the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education", a consensus document that details some of the actions that should be considered to make the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education a reality.

The importance of education in the bi-regional project was reaffirmed at the 1st EU-CELAC Summit, held in Santiago de Chile in 2013. This first summit, adjusted to the new, inclusive, bi-regional summit format, bears testament to the agreement to prioritize the education development. This is reflected in the formulation of the EU-CELAC Action Plan 2013-2015, which aims to promote student, professor, and staff mobility as well as exchanges between higher education institutions in the EU and Latin American and Caribbean countries. But the ambition in this area leads the summit declaration itself that called for new versions of the Action Plan which would possibly include additional chapters covering areas of interest such as Higher Education.

The 2nd EU-CELAC Summit held in Brussels on June 10-11, 2015, represents a qualitative leap in the conception of higher education within the bi-regional area. It did not only celebrate the progress made as a result of bi-regional cooperation in the field of higher education, with the support of EU programs such as Erasmus+ or Marie Skłodowska Curie actions as part of Horizon 2020 program, and the Paulo Freire and Pablo Neruda Academic Mobility Programs, but it also incorporated a new chapter in the bi-regional Action Plan, which is the 9th chapter, exclusively dedicated to higher education.

Since the Brussels summit in 2015, the bi-regional area has been working in ministerial meetings. Despite this change, higher education remains part of the bi-regional partnership as underlined in the declaration of the 2nd Foreign Ministers' Meeting "Building Bridges and Strengthening our Partnership to Face Global Challenges" signed in 2018. This declaration commends initiatives in the field of the Common Research Area and encourages bi-regional academic networks to work together to develop a future EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education.

Finally, in 2022, during the EU-CELAC 3rd Foreign Ministers meeting, held in Buenos Aires, it was agreed that the Summit system would be resumed. In response to this mandate, the academic community of the bi-regional area, gathered at the 2nd EU-CELAC Academic and Knowledge Summit in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, on May 4-5 2023, has sent a clear message of commitment to the realization of the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education.

We, the Ministers and High Authorities of Higher Education of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC), meeting in the city of Santiago de Compostela on May 5, 2023, in the framework of the celebration of the 2nd EU-CELAC Academic and Knowledge Summit, greet and welcome this message and with the conviction of the relevance of the bi-regional strategic partnership, concertation, unity and political dialogue to promote a joint agenda, we express our interest and willingness to continue to deepen and diversify this relationship, and in this context, we issue the following

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DECLARATION

We, the Ministers, and High Authorities of Higher Education of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC), acknowledge the need to continue and join our efforts to create an area for dialogue and coordination for bi-regional cooperation in the field of higher education while enhancing synergies with research and innovation. We are fully aware of the need to promote its development, based on shared values and principles, for which we must have a roadmap created through a shared vision that allows us to identify the required milestones, verify their attainment, review their approaches and sketch out future steps forward.

To do so, we understand that in the next stage of development of the bi-regional area it is more necessary than ever to establish a robust, respectful, thoughtful, and continuous dialogue to ensure the continuity of initiatives and agreements that the construction of the bi-regional area requires. To establish such a dialogue, we understand that it will be necessary to strengthen the Academic and Knowledge Summit as a dialogue and meeting forum for every player in the higher education system of the two regions, thereby promoting the establishment of a coordination, impulse, and follow-up mechanism.

We are aware that the work of the Academic and Knowledge Summit must be followed by the organization of a biannual ministerial forum, which will gather the ministers and high authorities in charge of higher education of our countries. This ministerial forum will serve as a platform for dialogue with the Summit, and it will give a status of political orientation to the reflections and conclusions of the Summit.

We recognize that these two instances are essential for the establishment of the Common Area of Higher Education and that together with the CELAC-EU University Council, whose creation was reflected in the 1st Academic and Knowledge Summit of San Salvador in 2017, will integrate the three institutional pillars of this area.

We understand that this institutional framework must be the driving force behind the EU-CELAC Common Area for Higher Education and that this driving force should have as its ultimate goal that of addressing the challenges posed by the global risks and challenges in a changing world, through relevant academic and scientific exchange and dialogue. In order to strengthen these dimensions, we have identified a number of crucial working areas for the implementation of the EU-CELAC common higher education area.

The first area is the cooperation of educational systems, as a way to bring our societies closer together and to promote scientific and academic exchange. For this purpose, it will be necessary to accelerate the ratification of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and to explore the convenience of articulating systems for the mutual recognition of degrees, bilateral agreements on access to higher education and agreements on the quality of shared education.

The second area is the definition of a working plan to promote cooperation between the quality assurance and recognition agencies of the countries in both regions. This will contribute

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simultaneously to the building of trust between the higher education systems and institutions and continuous improvement in the quality of higher education in our countries. In this field, it would be necessary to promote a regional cooperation platform between the agencies of both regions, based on the collaboration initiative already established between the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES).

The third area is the promotion of academic mobility between regions through the reinforcement of currently existing programs and relaunching of cooperation with new bi-regional programs and initiatives, that incorporate more innovative ways to promote a more inclusive internationalization. We consider bi-regional programs as an essential tool for the academic exchange of students, professors, and researchers and, at the same time, as an instrument that articulates and enhances the efforts of governments, higher education public and private institutions.

The fourth area is the vertical and horizontal development of networks for the promotion of bi-regional dialogue and academic cooperation between higher education institutions of both regions. These networks should also serve to deepen the exchange of good practices, with special emphasis on those initiatives that comply with and follow up on the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. The ability of States to address their development needs and priorities must be free from unilateral coercive measures contrary to International Law and the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of UNESCO.

The fifth area is to work towards a greater presence of the region of Latin American and the Caribbean in EU funding instruments in the field of higher education, promoting its participation in different projects such as Horizon Europe or Erasmus +, including all countries, even those considered as high-income countries, as well as the commitment to the creation and promotion of joint programs by higher education institutions in the two regions.

We hereby declare our will to commit ourselves to achieve the Common Area of Higher Education European Union - CELAC through the development of the aforementioned working areas. We take up the message conveyed from the 2nd EU-CELAC Academic and Knowledge Summit, and we call on the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government, which will take place in Brussels, Belgium, on July 17 and 18, 2023, to consider the contents reflected in this declaration and to contribute to advance in the establishment of this Common Space by adopting measures that constitute the foundation to advance in this shared objective, for the benefit of the peoples of both regions.