

ASTURIAS DECLARATION

Oviedo, 11 April 2006

On 10-11 April 2006, the Consejo Universitario Iberoamericano (CUIB) and the European University Association (EUA) gathered in Oviedo (Spain), at a meeting hosted jointly by the University of Oviedo and the Prince of Asturias Foundation to establish priorities for higher education and research cooperation in the years to come and to prepare a joint declaration as input to the EU-LAC summit meeting that will take place in Vienna on 11/12 May 2006.

I. PREAMBLE

Considering that:

- The UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education (Paris, 1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999), the Brasilia Statement for Science and Technology Cooperation (2002), the Guadalajara Declaration (2004), and the Salamanca Declaration (2005), underline the importance of higher education and research as a public responsibility, as well as the benefits of international cooperation.
- The CUIB, in its constitutive act (2002) aims to foster cooperation with universities from other regions and underpins the role of universities in processes of regional integration.
- The EUA Glasgow Declaration (2005) reaffirms these principles and acknowledges that European integration must be accompanied by strengthened international cooperation based on a community of interests.
- CUIB and EUA, representing the universities in their respective areas, signed a Framework Agreement on the 27th May 2004 with the objective of uniting efforts to build a common area for higher education and research between EU and LAC universities.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Latin American, Caribbean and European universities:

- Commit themselves to forging a strategic alliance between universities in these regions, *for their mutual benefit* and in the interests of solidarity, in order to establish a shared knowledge area, based on the principles of sustainable development and respect for their rich heritage and cultural diversity.
- Recognize that this cooperation serves a multiplicity of objectives: reinforcing common heritage and traditions; promoting excellence; fostering competitiveness and innovation through knowledge transfer and capacity building.
- Seek to play a crucial role as engines for development within their respective countries and regions, on the basis that their primary objective is to promote the education and training of knowledgeable, enterprising and resourceful people.

- Share a commitment to the social underpinning of economic growth and the ethical dimensions of higher education and research, and reiterate the importance of upholding the principle of public responsibility for higher education.

III. PRIORITIES

- ***Supporting the development of human resources***

EU and LAC societies require highly skilled populations, which have to be developed by close attention to human resources and the preparation of future generations of researchers and teachers in higher education. Particular attention must be paid, through the facilitation of mobility, to the needs of countries not currently able to generate sufficient numbers of doctoral students able to form the next generation of university teachers and researchers.

- ***Promoting information sharing on reform process in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean***

Mutual knowledge and understanding is crucial for building successful partnerships. Thus EUA and CUIB will promote and facilitate information sharing on convergence processes in Europe, in particular the Bologna reforms, and similar processes underway in Latin American and Caribbean higher education systems.

- ***Developing innovative inter-institutional research collaboration and partnerships***

EU and LAC universities have similar responsibilities for providing broad research-based education in response to society's growing need for professionals with a wide range of skills, and for enhancing research and innovation; therefore they commit to promoting long-term inter-institutional research collaboration, across a wide range of academic disciplines.

- ***Enhancing cooperation with business and enterprises***

Joint cooperation should encompass the encouragement of dialogue with industry and its main stakeholders in EU and LAC countries as a means of contributing to the training of young professionals in LAC. Such cooperation should include support for the creation of research parks and research/technology centres as one way of promoting sustainable national and regional development.

- ***Increasing the two-way mobility of students, researchers and academic staff***

EU and LAC universities reiterate the importance of mobility of academic staff, researchers and students in fostering a common knowledge area and believe that reciprocal mobility should be increased and become an integral part of all partnership agreements. This requires ensuring that appropriate arrangements for the recognition of study periods spent abroad are in place.

- ***Strengthening quality assurance***

EU and LAC universities consider that strengthening cooperation in quality assurance will serve to develop a firm basis for mutual trust and will improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts, thus facilitating recognition and the development of joint programmes.

- **Language learning**

Universities need to be able to communicate at different levels in order to develop sustainable partnerships. CUIB and EUA therefore underline the importance of including provision for language learning as an essential component of all joint programmes and activities.

Prerequisites for developing long-term partnerships

Universities are committed to promoting democracy, enhancing cultural, social and technological innovation and contributing fully to building the knowledge-based societies of the future. In order to fulfill these aspirations and to underpin cooperation in the different areas set out above, the EUA and CUIB reiterate the importance of *strengthening the autonomy and responsibility of universities* and of *ensuring sustainable and diversified funding*. They furthermore draw attention to the importance of enhancing institutional leadership in order to ensure that the appropriate professional management systems and arrangements are in place to implement successfully joint cooperation agreements.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Governments* should give greater priority to the support of initiatives agreed in the Summit conclusions and should involve all partners in the follow-up arrangements. This requires adequate follow-up of EU-LAC summits, continuing senior officials meetings for science and technology, and ALCUE follow-up group meetings, as well as ensuring synergies between them and involving higher education institutions in these processes in an adequate way.
- *Governments, the European Commission and private funding bodies* should allocate increased funding to promote enhanced cooperation in higher education and research as a matter of priority. *The European Commission is encouraged to strengthen existing initiatives* open to universities in Latin American and Caribbean countries such as Alpha, Alban and Erasmus Mundus - for example through the opening of a Latin-American and Caribbean “window” in Erasmus Mundus along the lines of the recently agreed “Asian window” - in the priority areas identified, as well as to increase opportunities for involvement in the 7th Framework Programme for Research. All such initiatives should take account of Latin American and Caribbean realities and favour endogenous growth. Governments should ensure that the appropriate legal frameworks are modified to allow LAC countries that are part of the ACP group to participate in all EU-LAC higher education and research initiatives.
- *Universities* should develop joint programmes as a priority area for collaboration; while the central element should remain the advancement of knowledge through research, activities should also take account of changing labour market needs.
- *Universities* should also make better use of existing national, regional, EU and LAC instruments and mechanisms for research cooperation and *governments* are asked to introduce additional measures to increase possibilities for collaborative research between universities in the two regions as a matter of priority.
- *Universities* must also use to the full the opportunities offered by existing networks and cooperation schemes at national and European level *to facilitate academic staff*,

researchers and student exchange between EU and LAC countries. *Governments* and universities should provide particular incentives for continuous two-way mobility of doctoral candidates and young researchers/academic staff, building on the example of the Marie Curie programme, as a particularly effective means of building stable inter-institutional partnerships between universities. *Governments are urged to take action to solve barriers to mobility* such as restrictive visa requirements, residence permits, internship and labour-market regulations.

V. CONCLUSION

The CUIB and the EUA, representing universities in their respective regions:

- commit themselves to the principles, priorities and recommendations for action included in this Declaration and to establishing an action plan for their implementation;
- urge the EU-LAC Heads of State meeting on 11/12 May in Vienna to accept their responsibilities: in recognizing the importance of and providing the necessary support for strengthening higher education and research cooperation between their two regions as a means of promoting cultural, social and technological innovation, and to working together with universities to ensure rapid progress in the implementation of the recommendations made.

Oviedo, Asturias, 11 April 2006

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