

Go beyond resilience to tackle local and global challenges

Position dated 31 March 2021

The leading research-intensive universities of Science and Technology (S&T) united within [CESAER](#) with this position contribute to the ongoing debate on the European Union's upcoming Global Approach to Research, Education and Innovation.

With a view to tackle the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ([UN SDG](#)) and address local and global challenges, we call upon the EU institutions to (i) assume leadership at the global level, (ii) promote agency of academic institutions and academics, and (iii) boost the systemic changes and transformations needed to stimulate cultural, economic and societal recovery and to build resilience in pursuit of ecological, economic and social sustainability ([European Green Deal](#)) and digitalisation ([Europe fit for the digital age](#)). We point out the major local and global challenges which loom behind the current pandemic, such as social exclusion, increasing inequality of the share of wealth, climate change, plastic pollution, biodiversity loss, despotism and authoritarianism.

Complementing our positions [Towards a truly reinforced European Research Area \(ERA\)](#), [Towards a dynamic European Education Area \(EEA\) driven by excellence, sustainable funding, recovery](#) and [research talent circulation](#), we advise that the EU's Global Approach to Research, Innovation and Education facilitates S&T excellence in all its facets and capacity building where the pandemic and local and global challenges hit hardest. Acknowledging the need for the EU to be realistic and - in duly justified and exceptional cases - have the capacity to exclude parties from third countries from its S&T cooperation and competition, we urge regional and national governments and the EU institutions to pursue openness in principle and in practice as the default *modus operandi* therewith maintaining and strengthening Europe's attractiveness for talent and for excellent research, education and innovation.

(i) Assume leadership at global level

The EU is a world leader in research, education and innovation and deeply interlinked globally. Accessing (complementary) scientific knowledge, key technologies and top-talent from third countries is of key interest to the EU. Europe's history has proven that open cooperation and competition are essential to boost excellence, achieve inclusion and bring peace and prosperity to our societies.

In our view, the EU institutions need to:

- Endorse a multilateral approach to strengthen the leading role of European research, education and innovation making genuine and substantial contributions to the world and strengthen its partnerships and dialogues with global partners;

- Ensure that the ERA and EEA cover all signatory countries of the [Council of Europe](#) and other countries associated to the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ programmes;
- Reduce the R&I gap between members states and other countries in its vicinity (such as the Western Balkans) and widen the access to S&T excellence, notably through effectively linking and embedding the ERA and EEA to Next Generation EU and national recovery and resilience plans, the European Structural & Investment Funds, the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the European Neighbourhood Instrument and a partnership with Africa;
- Associate as many excellent and like-minded third countries in and beyond the vicinity of the EU as possible with the EU funding programmes;
- Lead by example and finally enact its 3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) target for private and public expenditures for Research and Innovation (R&I), and commit to 1.25% of its GDP from public sources for R&I and higher education respectively, in line with the best performers in the world.

(ii) Promote agency of academic institutions and academics

Open global cooperation and competition are vital to our community, as universities of S&T operate at the very forefront of (i) equipping researchers, innovators, learners and teachers with agency and (ii) the advancement of S&T for great changes and transformations. Open global cooperation and competition is foundational for excellence in S&T, allowing the best to find each other, work together to solve complex problems and use the best methods and tools available. European research, education and innovation thus thrive in global environments and participation of the best from institutions outside the EU (including in mono-beneficiary grants) is deeply beneficial to the EU, its universities and the ecosystem in which they flourish. We thus warn against top-down focus and prioritisation of global collaboration in research, education and innovation.

In our view, the EU institutions need to:

- Promote academic freedom, institutional autonomy and scientific integrity and the values laid down in the [Magna Charta Universitatum 2020](#) globally and defend academic institutions and academics against despotism, authoritarianism and government interference;
- Avoid jeopardising the longstanding and fruitful collaborations with our strongest partners in the vicinity of the current EU;
- Limit top-down programming along linear innovation models such as not to (i) distort the balance between investigator-driven frontier research and technological development, (ii) inhibit disruptive innovation and (iii) restrict the contribution of S&T to tackling the local and global challenges;
- Enforce its Treaties, ensure the rule of law in the member states and promote compliance with the [Bonn Declaration](#);
- Empower academic institutions and academics worldwide to engage in open science, open education and open innovation along academia/non-academia cooperation within [n-tuple helices](#) to the benefit of all;

- Empower academic institutions and academics to apply science diplomacy to open doors and build bridges between cultures, conflicts, countries and continents paving the way for political understanding and agreement and for fair political and economic cooperation;
- Provide sound support for open collaboration between academic institutions and academics from all over Europe with partners from like-minded countries beyond Europe through structuring the bottom-up alignment of expertise, with competitive research funding being organised once critical cooperative research mass has been achieved;
- Provide clarity early on and transparency for the duration of the EU funding programmes on any exclusions (such as the invocation of [article 22 § 5](#) of the regulation establishing Horizon Europe) through a 'Note of Interpretation' outlining the definitions, principles and process paving the way for correct understanding, full alignment between Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ and coherent and consistent application across all Commission services;
- Provide guidance and co-create tools that allow academic institutions and academics themselves to carry out risk-benefit analysis based on [universal values](#).

(iii) Boost systemic changes and transformations

Systemic changes and transformations are needed to help address local and global challenges along a Kuhnian shift of paradigm enriching the current competitiveness paradigm, and a pact between citizens and various players in society, including academia.

That is why we caution against undue emphasis on 'technological sovereignty', 'EU strategic autonomy' and 'EU-first-and-only' to guide the EU's future Global Approach to Research, Education and Innovation and express our deepest concerns about the indications of intentions to exclude partners from third countries from calls and projects under the EU funding programmes. Such exclusions will create inefficiency and duplication of efforts at the expense of scientific progress and all sides will end up spending more to make less progress, forcing institutions and individuals to find alternative ways to collaborate with global counterparts. In short, more is needed than building resilience and realising the twin-transitions in the EU to address local and global challenges.

Importantly, our [Members](#) operate at the very forefront of S&T, including those that may be applied for dual-use purposes, and are well aware of the risks and challenges of foreign government interference, including through academic institutions and academics from abroad. That is why we continuously (self-) assess; build capacity in our institutions to safeguard institutional autonomy, academic freedom and scientific integrity; and promote a culture of proactive awareness of risks and establish systems to supervise and mitigate them. We also assume responsibility to address such issues and our core values with our partners from abroad.

In our view, the EU institutions need to:

- Focus on the local and global challenges that loom behind the current pandemic; establish dialogue aimed at bridging between cultures, conflicts, countries and continents; and build forceful alliances to address them based on universal values;
- Pursue a level playing field with global partners by establishing a Global Framework for S&T Cooperation in order to (i) address the local and global challenges based on (financial) reciprocity and [universal values and principles](#), (ii) ensure diversity, multiplicity and reproducibility, and (iii) achieve mutual learning and effective solutions to local and global challenges;
- Identify legal obstacles at the regional, national, European and global levels for third countries to cooperate with European academic institutions, academics and other partners and remove them effectively;
- Ensure that the European University alliances are open and accessible to partners worldwide along co-funding from the respective governments at various levels;
- Follow the ‘as open as possible and as closed as necessary’ principle when considering any actions related to geopolitical realities or for safeguarding ‘safety and security’;
- Pool (national) funding programmes and establish access points and connections between them to empower universities to assume leadership in key areas of S&T at the global level (‘outwards looking and leading’ instead of ‘inwards looking and running behind’).

Genuine offer to contribute

We are committed to pledge concrete contributions to ecological, economic and social sustainability and co-create and join the Education for Climate Coalition. We offer expertise to support the Commission services to (i) establish a Global Framework for S&T Cooperation based on values, and (ii) advance the ‘Note of Interpretation’.

For more information, please contact our Secretary General [David Bohmert](#).

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[CESAER](#) is the European association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities of science and technology that: champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation; influence debate; contribute to the realisation of open knowledge societies; and, deliver significant scientific, social, economic, and societal impact.

