

Euro-Mediterranean University Cooperation. Towards the Construction of a Common Future

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University Cooperation in a Globalised World

Since the last decades of the 20th century, the world has witnessed profound changes largely stemming from the fall of the Soviet Empire. For better and for worse, the subsequent globalisation phenomenon has stepped up the pace of movements and contacts between peoples and individuals, while adding to the tension of ethnic and religious identities in its most violent form: terrorism.

Rampant globalisation brings about the emergence of new agents—citizen movements, NGOs, etc—and new challenges, such as cultural policies to defend cultural and linguistic diversity against US hegemony. Without losing ground, the political dimension of international relations is becoming increasingly enhanced by exchanges between civil societies, whose importance makes them an influential voice in multilateral politics. Within civic movements, the university has set itself up as an agent in human and socioeconomic development policies while cultural and educational issues are gaining relevance in the form of international exchanges. With a view to creating a common area for countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Barcelona Declaration (1995) promotes political, economic, social, cultural and human partnerships. In this framework, universities aim to contribute to consolidating relations between countries on both sides of the Mediterranean by creating transnational networks.

The Spanish-Moroccan Mixed Inter-University Committee: Ten Years of Intense Cooperation (1996-2006)

In the sphere of bilateral relations, university cooperation between Morocco and Spain boasts an important tool that commemorated its ten years of existence in 2006. Created in 1996 within the framework of the Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness, over the years the Spanish-Moroccan Mixed Inter-University Committee has consolidated relations between the university communities of both countries, funding joint research projects on pluridisciplinary issues deemed urgent and of common interest. It is estimated that over the past ten years some 4,000 researchers on both sides of the Mediterranean, many of them doctoral students and young researchers, have benefited from the programme's backing. So far, over 800 research projects have been funded by the Spanish International Cooperation Agency (AECI) and Moroccan universities involved. The Spanish-Moroccan Mixed Inter-University Committee, with two headquarters (AECI and the Mohammed V-Agdal University of Rabat), is thus favouring long-term cooperation based on networks and poles of excellence whose scope can be included in the framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

Tampere University Rectors' Conference. From the Tarragona Declaration to the Creation of the EuroMed Permanent University Forum/EPUF

In the Euro-Mediterranean context, inter-university cooperation received a major boost in 2006 with the University Rectors' Conference held in Tampere (Finland) from 9th-11th October. Under the aegis of

the Finnish EU presidency, the conference was jointly organised by the Meda Institute of the Polytechnic University of Tampere and the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona.

The conference was organised in the framework of the university network that was created in Alicante in 2004 and had continuity in Tarragona (2005) and Malta (2006). Implemented as part of the Barcelona

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Process, the network assists in strengthening cultural and educational exchanges between countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The Tampere meeting has focused on establishing the EuroMed Permanent University Forum (EPUF), to which over 60 universities and university institutions from northern and southern Mediterranean countries have adhered. The EPUF Constitution was signed during the meeting.

The Tampere Conference constitutes a decisive, significant stage in the process that began in Alicante and developed with the *Tarragona Declaration for Dialogue and Cooperation between Euro-Mediterranean Universities* signed in 2005. Focusing on "the construction of a Euro-Mediterranean society," the Tarragona initiative was created with a view to materialising the third approach of the Barcelona Declaration: the human and cultural sector (along with politics and security, and economy and finance).

The Tarragona Declaration aims to enhance university institutions' contribution on both sides of the Mediterranean and "foster dialogue between the region's cultural traditions, disseminate a culture of human rights and democratic citizenry and promote the sustainable development of scientific and technological exchanges." The Declaration is committed to "creating a Euro-Mediterranean Area of Higher Education and Research that contributes to the promotion of a knowledge society, encourages collaboration and dialogue among educational institutions, increases the institutions' efficiency and ensures quality of teaching and research, education based on equality and further involves civil society in the knowledge society."

EPUF: A Euro-Mediterranean University Area

The EuroMed Permanent University Forum can be seen as the materialisation of the aim to create a "Euro-Mediterranean Area of Higher Education and Research." Indeed, in terms of a Euro-Mediterranean university forum, EPUF intends to work towards improving quality in education and research by fostering university exchanges in the Euro-Mediterranean Area as contained in the action plan approved by the university representatives that attended the Tampere conference:

- Disseminate and propagate the Forum spirit with a view to creating a vast inter-university network based on long-term programmes and projects;
- Attempt to involve all actors in the region (local government and non-government institutions, associations, foundations) to join forces and accompany the projects planned;
- Reflect on the issue of raise funding, particularly crucial in southern countries, receiving decisive support from the EU and Anna Lindh Foundation programmes;
- Encourage academic mobility (academic staff, researchers and technical and administrative staff) paying special attention to young researchers and doctoral students. Encouraging exchanges between southern universities is also recommended. In order to achieve this objective, it is advisable to improve mobility accompaniment measures, namely:
 - The mutual recognition of titles and diplomas, which involves promoting the Bologna process for the application of the qualifications reform (Degree, Master's Degree and PhD). Given the difficulty of a widespread implementation of the new system in the short term, mobility may be possible through specific programmes adapted to the Euro-Med Area, similar to the Erasmus programme;
 - Enable free circulation of researchers from the south to the north, establishing more humane and less arbitrary rules and criteria when it comes to granting visas.
- Celebrate a general meeting in June 2007 in Rabat or Alexandria;
- Establish working groups focusing on specific topics and programmes.

Moroccan universities have developed new strategies and tools to promote research and better teaching and training

The conclusions and recommendations of the University Rectors' Conference were submitted during the November 2006 meeting in Tampere to the EuroMed Region's Foreign Affairs Ministers, who also approved the establishment and programme of activities of EPUF.

Following the University Rectors' Conference in Tampere, an EPUF executive secretariat of northern and southern universities has been established with headquarters at the Rovira i Virgili University. Its members plan to meet in March 2007 in Tarragona. During the month of December, EPUF group coordinators held their first meeting at the University "L'Orientale" of Naples to define the work methodology and intervention area of each one. Five working groups have been formed on the following subject areas:

Group 1: Mobility

Group 2: Harmonisation and quality control

Group 3: Governability

Group 4: Human development and active citizenship

Group 5: Communication

Each group, led by two members representing a southern and northern university, has defined an activity programme with the aim of launching it shortly. Adherence to EPUF is open to all institutions with an interest in joining the Forum.

During the Naples meeting and in parallel to the constitution of the EPUF groups, Rovira i Virgili University has presented a new programme of cooperation between universities in the EuroMed area entitled *Erasmus Mundus Window*.

Perspectives: Erasmus Mundus Window Programme and the Creation of a Network of Young Researchers

With a view to exporting the Bologna process, the Erasmus Mundus Window programme intends to apply a common policy to universities in the EuroMed member countries, harmonising education systems and diploma recognition. This encourages mobility between northern and southern universities, its academic staff, students and administrative and technical staff.

As a result of the Rovira i Virgili University proposal made during the Naples meeting, a project has been drawn up by the northern university consortium, to

ICTDAR

According to the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) "active knowledge acquisition and utilisation in the building of human capital are key aspects in the economic growth of the region. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are vital to build up a knowledge society and sustain human development. It is not only a matter of investing in computers and in spreading internet but it entails the adoption new organizational models and mentality".

In October 2003, the UNDP's regional Program established in Cairo the ICTDAR – Information and Communication Technologies for Development in the Arab Region. The objective of ICTDAR is to assist Arab States in harnessing ICT. ICTDAR's main priorities for progress are: awareness raising, campaigns development and participation, employment generation and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the region mainly carried out through ICTDAR projects implementation in the region. The main pillars of its approach are the development of partnership agreements with key members in the private sector, local governments and NGOs who are believed to be aware of the key issues affecting their surroundings; focus on a small objective, involving and assisting local communities and governments to become instrumental to implement those initiatives at a national level.

"Different initiatives, one objective: opening the gates of opportunity to the Arab people"

ICTDAR projects have different targets and different geographical implementation.

- AjaCom: is a regional youth empowerment project aiming at enabling Youth in the Arab world to reach their potential by harnessing ICT and improving their access to knowledge. By including women and unemployed graduates, this project contributes to reduce poverty and illiteracy, part of the MDGs, and it has already been implemented in Morocco and Egypt.

- eGovernance: launched in 2004, its aim is to use information and communication technology to raise the quality of services delivered to citizens by governments according to a new culture of efficiency, optimization and transparency and to stimulate government administrative and political reforms.

- ICTDARB: the initiative aims at using ICT to help visually impaired individuals; it provides specialized tools made available through community access centres to have access to training, knowledge and services.

- WRCATI: it is a women empowerment initiative that uses ICT to allow women greater understanding and knowledge of their rights. This is achieved through the development of relevant legal information in a digital format and by disseminating them through CDs, websites, audiotapes. The content, in Arabic and in a simplified language, deals with civil, legal and religious issues relating to family law.

For further information: www.ictdar.org

which southern universities have become associated, among them the Mohammed V-Agdal University of Rabat. The European Union has recently approved the project, entitled MUNDUSFOR, consisting of a Master's degree in Education of Professionals in Education that offers students and teachers from non-European universities the chance to take part in high-level training. The project will be developed in three stages from September 2007 to September 2010.

Moreover, a number of northern and southern Mediterranean institutions are organising a *Network of Young Researchers around the Mediterranean*. The network seeks to promote intercultural dialogue and improved mutual knowledge based on the construction of a new Mediterranean society. The first stage has included a preparatory meeting at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in Barcelona with the attendance of organising entities and associated bodies and the participation of the Instituto de Estudios Hispano-Lusos.

The first Meeting of Young Researchers around the Mediterranean as field of study will be held in Tarragona in May 2007. It will include the following thematic areas: globalisation, governability and north-south exchanges, sociocultural context, intercultural dialogue, development, cooperation and economic changes, etc.

Innovative Initiatives from Morocco: Instituto de Estudios Hispano-Lusos and Universidad de los Dos Reyes

Over the past few decades, education and human development have become a national priority in Morocco, mobilising society as a whole, including government and non-government institutions. To mitigate the insufficiencies and ensure access to education for all, generalised literacy and training programmes have increased.

An ambitious modernisation programme has been launched for Higher Education, opening the university to its socioeconomic environment and thus meeting the challenges of globalisation.

Eager to become fully integrated into the international arena, Moroccan universities have developed new strategies and tools to promote research and better teaching and training, adapting them to new national and international demands.

Special attention has been paid to the Euro-

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Mediterranean Area, given that integration in the region is a priority for Morocco, where political strategies are being developed in all fields—security, economic, cultural and human—to achieve admission. Since 2001, a major educational reform has been underway following the recommendations of the Bologna Process. Moroccan universities are at a very advanced stage in the application of the reform, having organised their degrees and master's degrees in semesters and modules. Now all that is left is to reform doctoral studies.

By establishing numerous cooperation programmes with eastern and northern Mediterranean universities, Moroccan universities have a strong presence in the Euro-Mediterranean university area. In addition to those mentioned above (Spanish-Moroccan Mixed Inter-University Committee, EPUF, Erasmus Mundi, etc), it is worth mentioning the following programmes: Between 2002 and 2004, nearly 30 projects were funded by the European Union in the framework of the TEMPUS MEDA programme. In association with various European and Arab university institutions, the Mohammed V-Agdal University is participating in this European programme with projects devoted to issues such as governability, initial or lifelong training (master's degrees), institutional evaluation, higher education quality assessment, etc.

In December 2006, an important meeting was held in Morocco to present and launch the Mediterranean Network of *National Information Centres for the Recognition of Qualifications* (MERIC).

Among the Moroccan initiatives that aim to influence the Mediterranean university area is the recently created *Instituto de Estudios Hispano-Lusos* and the *Universidad de los Dos Reyes*.

Instituto de Estudios Hispano-Lusos (IEHL) was set up by Royal Decree at the end of 2005 at the Mohammed V-Agdal University of Rabat. Intended for the study and research of civilisations and cultures in Spain, Portugal and Latin American countries, its task consists of reevaluating the shared historical heritage of Morocco and the Spanish-Portuguese world, as well as investigating major pluridisciplinary issues of common interest linked to the present and future.

IEHL seeks to become a tool for "cultural and university diplomacy", as well as a national and international

Universidad de los Dos Reyes (U2R), is a major Spanish-Moroccan educational project that is both ambitious and unprecedented

education and research centre, thus confirming Morocco's vocation as leader and bridge between the African and Arab worlds, on the one hand, and between Europe and Latin America, on the other.

In 2006, IEHL established partnerships with national and international institutions, confirming its Mediterranean and Atlantic scope, and joined cooperation networks in the Euro-Mediterranean area. Universidad de los Dos Reyes (U2R), whose headquarters will be located in Tetuán, is a major Spanish-Moroccan educational project that is both ambitious and unprecedented, and may play a pivotal role in strengthening relations between Spain and Morocco, as well as other countries in the Mediterranean region.

Indeed, a mixed committee of Moroccan and Spanish experts will be in charge of establishing the university, which will feature multilingual education (basically in Spanish and Arabic), in close collaboration with Moroccan and Spanish universities. U2R aims to become a space for dialogue and education in the Euro-Mediterranean Area, offering high-level training that is suffused with human values of solidarity and mutual understanding.

The initiatives are new to the Spanish-Moroccan university arena and open promising new perspectives for enhancing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. From the viewpoint of Morocco, these initiatives are grounded in the conviction that the recognition of a

state relies heavily on its cultural representation abroad, on the human and cultural image it projects. They also entail the opening of university institutions to their immediate and distant environment, and a commitment to active university diplomacy based on solidarity and reciprocity.

Towards an Active University and Cultural Diplomacy

Indeed, university diplomacy can be seen as an antidote against cultural conflicts and disagreements. Strong human ties are often formed around university exchanges, which help strengthen international communication and understanding. This explains why such cooperation is becoming increasingly necessary to ensure enduring, stable ties between states and countries.

University diplomacy can be seen as an antidote against cultural conflicts and disagreements

By promoting powerful ongoing initiatives and programmes that involve co-development, inter-university cooperation can make a valuable contribution to the betterment of relations between countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to prosperity and stability in the area.

The will to construct a common university future that is based on solidarity and encourages the mobility of young researchers may bring about the emergence of a transnational Euro-Mediterranean collective conscience, a step towards the world citizenship that is so fervently sought.