

The Higher-Education Area and Scientific Cooperation in the Mediterranean: The Role of the Euro-Mediterranean University

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With the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean University on 9 June 2008, an important step was taken towards creating a unified, harmonised Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education, Science and Research Area. It took 13 years from the initial idea of a Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) dealing with the goals of the Barcelona Declaration (1995) to its inauguration by the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, during the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council (2008).

EMUNI was established to advance cooperation in higher education, following up on the objectives of the Catania Process (2005) and the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research (Cairo, June 2007). In its first year of operation, EMUNI, whose main campus is in Portorož, Slovenia, elected its constituent bodies and implemented a variety of activities addressing Euro-Mediterranean topics.

EMUNI is based on the mobility of knowledge, and it promotes cooperation in higher education through its role as coordinator and facilitator of joint academic and research activities. EMUNI develops and strengthens academic and scientific innovations designed in the Union for the Mediterranean involving universities, research centres and other institutions from any of the Euro-Mediterranean countries, which gives it a unique character. Its main objective is to facilitate and enhance the mobility of staff and students in cooperation with the co-founding institutions. For this reason, graduate and other academic programmes are designed to reinforce the North-South and South-South mobility of ideas, expertise and academic know-how.

EMUNI offers postgraduate and doctoral programmes in keeping with the targets set in the Millennium De-

velopment Goals, with special emphasis on the UfM's priority areas and others, such as human rights and migration, Euro-Mediterranean studies, gender issues, development studies, water management, the performing arts and regional integration. In order to foster a multicultural environment and draw students and professors from the entire Euro-Mediterranean region, EMUNI offers doctoral research seminars, summer schools (as forums where participants can gain expert knowledge while experiencing other cultures and increasing mutual understanding among the countries involved) and round-table discussions on the main topics of interest in the international environment. Moreover, through a cooperation network of 142 institutions from 37 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region, EMUNI, working with the co-founding institutions, sponsors conferences, discussions and similar events aimed at increasing its visibility and promoting the establishment of a unified higher education area in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In addition, EMUNI produces several publications and promotional materials.

EMUNI Project Intervention

EMUNI's main objectives, as set forth in its Founding Charter, are:

- To develop academic and professional human resources in the region, as well as to generate scientific and scholarly knowledge and information, and thereby contribute to attaining the main goals of the Barcelona Process, with special regard to the creation of a common higher education and research area in line with the developments of the Bologna Process, the Catania Declaration and the Cairo Declaration.
- To support and strengthen existing cooperation networks among universities and institutes in

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership countries by promoting and organising joint study and research programmes.

- To contribute to enhancing intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to strengthening the Barcelona Process through its activities in the field of higher education and research.

In order to ensure the success of the EMUNI project and a smooth start to its operation, financial support was assured by the government of the Republic of Slovenia, the European Commission and the EMUNI Foundation, which was set up to obtain financial resources for the university. Several contributions from Slovenian and foreign donors to the EMUNI Foundation were used to implement the first postgraduate programmes and provide support for other EMUNI projects. In early 2010, EMUNI concluded a service contract with the European Commission that includes action in three main ranges of activities:

Activity 1: Developing of Six Postgraduate Study Programmes

The objective is to create a network of specialised postgraduate programmes among Euro-Mediterranean universities. International comparability will be ensured with respect to credits (promoting the use of the European Credit Transfer system), courses and the scientific and professional qualifications awarded. As for fields of study, special attention will be given to topics related to the Euro-Mediterranean region. Complete study programmes (or portions thereof) will be offered at EMUNI-partner universities and institutions. For this part of the project, a minimum of 8 teams consisting of 5 key experts each, some on a rotating commission depending on the need for the development of each postgraduate programme, will be engaged. Prior to being recruited, each key expert will need to be systematically approved by the European Commission (submitting an appropriate CV to the Contracting Authority). A project leader, who is also an expert, will head the 8 teams and be responsible for organising each one's work. He or she may choose a team chair for each team in order to facilitate the flow of information about the work's progress. Team members may work from their place of origin, using e-connections, where possible. The project leader will hold regular meetings, also through virtual channels, with the team members to discuss progress on the project and shape the

development of new postgraduate programmes. He or she will also hold meetings with the EMUNI project authorities to report on progress.

Each team will be monitored and assisted by the project leader and the EMUNI support structure, set up specifically for this project from a commission of EMUNI Senate members elected for their expertise and representing the entire UfM region. Another EMUNI administrative team will be directly responsible for the operational progress of developing the postgraduate programmes. No fees and/or costs linked to the operation of the EMUNI support structure or this EMUNI administrative team may be charged to the project.

Additionally, the project leader will coordinate work, delegate tasks, propose and hold meetings, and prepare regular operational progress reports on each postgraduate programme.

Activity 2: Developing the Main EMUNI Policies

The development of EMUNI policies will help strengthen and extend the EMUNI network and promote the harmonisation of the higher education area in the Union for the Mediterranean. All of the foregoing was specifically requested at the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting held in Cairo. The topics to be addressed include:

- Quality assurance policy;
- E-learning policy;
- Ideas for master's programmes; and
- Ideas for PhD programmes.

Teams of key experts will be charged with developing the above, and at least four handbooks will be produced as a result of this activity.

Prior to being recruited, each key expert will need to be systematically approved by the European Commission (submitting an appropriate CV to the Contracting Authority).

Activity 3: Organising of International EMUNI Conferences and Disseminating of Project Achievements

The following set of conferences, seminars and meetings are to be held under the project:

- ReS Souk (Research Souk), which brought together experts and students in focused research

IALOGUE AMONG CULTURES AND TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS AND VALUES

For some years now, the world has experienced confrontations and misunderstandings between Muslims and the West every time Muslims have felt the symbols of their religion were being slandered. First there were the Copenhagen incidents following the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, then the publication of caricatures on the construction of minarets in Switzerland, as well as the assassination of the young Egyptian woman, Marwa El Sherbini, in Germany, a tragedy that gave rise to a good deal of debate and comments, all of which brings us to the theme of this piece: the debate on the international definition of "defamation of religion."

On the one hand, there is an indisputable, sacred value, which is the freedom of expression in the West, and on the other hand, there is the will of those who wish to protect the symbols of their religion against defamation, above all in Islamic countries.

The quarrels and confrontations on these topics have arisen, in reality, from an absence of dialogue among cultures, which could help each party to transmit their concepts and values to the other. How useful and judicious it would have been to organize conferences on the means and methods for reconciling the values held by the West and Islamic countries, some shared and some in opposition, an opposition and confrontation stoked by the attitude of the media.

At a conference organized in Cairo three years ago by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs of Egypt, as President of the Dialogue Commission, I proposed a resolution to the Ministers of Religious Affairs of 120 Muslim countries, to be submitted to their Ministers of Foreign Affairs, inviting the UN to adopt a resolution aiming to penalise defamation of religious values and symbols. This text was written under counsel of certain authorities on International Law, among them Dr. Fouad Riad, former President of the International Court of Justice of the Hague, as well as important Muslim jurists living in the USA. Unfortunately, the UN did not adopt the resolution. This situation naturally disappointed the Muslim world, which considers that there is a double standard with regard to the protection granted to the Jewish community to combat anti-Semitism while Islamophobia endures.

At conferences taking place in Vienna, Madrid and Cairo, I have repeatedly proposed to international institutions of dialogue that a conference of international dimension be organized, bringing together intellectuals and media experts from the West and Islamic countries in order to peacefully and tranquilly seek a historic conciliation between freedom of expression and the right to the protection of the symbols and values of many religions in the world, and above all in Islamic countries, threatened by the danger of Islamophobia after the September 11 events.

For me, dialogue among cultures also means taking an interest in schoolbooks in order to prevent children from reading and assimilating negative references against another people.

Through the Union Internationale pour le Dialogue Judéo-Islam-Chrétien et l'Education de la Paix (ADIC), based in Paris and of which I am the President, I have undertaken a long-term initiative among teachers, in particular history teachers, in order to examine their views of conflictive stages, stages which have, in my opinion, been a source of misunderstandings for centuries, as well as texts on the holy war.

At the same time, and in order to attain a balance on both sides of the Mediterranean, I've asked experts to examine the schoolbooks used by students in North African countries to ensure protection of the image of the Other, the people of North Mediterranean Countries, supposedly the former colonisers of the South Mediterranean Countries.

In conclusion, I insist in affirming that reaching an understanding among peoples and restoring peace among advocates of apparently contradictory and conflicting values comprise a long-term problem requiring efforts in the spheres of culture and education, and above all efforts by the media, in particular television, which has become the school par excellence among the population at large, moulding people's spirits and conditioning their reactions.

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dissemination activities in June 2010. They were joined by 50 on-site experts, complemented by the virtual presence of 300 researchers. The main partners of this year's Research Souk, held in Alexandria, Egypt, were the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (the seat of ancient and future knowledge), the University of Alexandria (which holds a senate seat at EMUNI) and the EU Delegation in Egypt.

- HE&R, a higher education and research conference for postgraduate students and academic and civil society experts to be held in September 2010 with some one hundred participants. The theme for 2010 will be entrepreneurship and higher education.
- A conference/thematic workshop on Euro-Mediterranean priorities to be held in November/December 2010 with the participation of one hundred experts.

- Six regional Euro-Mediterranean Listening Days, to be held in February 2010, May 2010 and January 2011, with some 30-50 participants per event. Dissemination of the results will be ensured via handbooks, leaflets, brochures, newsletters, journals (IJEMS) and others publications, including digital ones.

Underlying Risks of the Project Implementation

The EMUNI project implementation is anchored in the UfM's priorities. The project's vulnerability thus lies in the region's changing sensibilities. EMUNI has, since its inception, worked in the sphere of academic cooperation. Academic cooperation initiated by EMUNI has continued and is expected to proceed in terms of co-ownership and mobility; the risks are thus minimal in this regard. It is assumed that EMUNI, as guaranteed

by the two General Assemblies held in Barcelona and Sousse, will continue to operate at least at the same level of institutional commitment as it has to date. Therefore, South-South and South-North cooperation should be expanded or at least maintained at the same level through the different activities, which are carried out in parallel to the core tasks in support of EMUNI. In order to guarantee the end results of tailor-made academic programmes for the Mediterranean and academic mobility, reasonable deadlines have been set to reach the targets.

In light of the above, the major risks are:

- A generalised vs specific concerted effort to establish the final work packages.
- Narrow use of the expertise found in the region
- A lack of synergy with parallel actions with the Euromed region.
- Restricted use of the dissemination tools to support the project.

Visibility and Communication of the EMUNI Intervention Project

Generally speaking, EMUNI will ensure the visibility and communication of the project in accordance with the EU's visibility guidelines for external actions (http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm). Particular attention will be paid to visibility and communication in Mediterranean Partner Countries in collaboration with EU delegations. To this end, the use of the existing Euromed Information website for programme communication and visibility (www.enpi-info.eu) is one of the planned instruments for dissemination.

EMUNI Activities in 2008-2009 and Recent Developments

The activities in the 2008-2009 academic year included three pilot master's programmes in the areas of energy and sustainable development, Euro-Mediterranean cultures and policies, and Euro-Mediterranean culture and tourism; the second Euro-Mediterranean Summer School, held at 7 locations in 4 countries; the sponsor or co-sponsor of 10 international conferences; and a doctoral research seminar on the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Basin.

In addition to its active involvement and co-operation in the academic sphere, EMUNI cooperates with many international institutions and is active in political bodies

in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is the official think tank of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), and it works closely with the International Association of Universities (IAU), the European University Association (EUA), the Association of Arab Universities and other Euromed networks, such as the Euromed Permanent University Forum (EPUF) and the Mediterranean Universities Union (Unimed). EMUNI cooperates with higher education institutions, research institutions, higher education and research networks, and other associations in delivering courses that are recognised at the national level but are also intercultural and multicultural. Indeed, in all of its activities, EMUNI ensures the presence of non-EU experts and neighbourhood learners in partnership with those from the EU. EMUNI has also signed agreements and memoranda with international institutions that are active in the Euro-Mediterranean region or have similar goals to EMUNI's. With the aim of promoting its activities and increasing its visibility and cooperation with the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area, EMUNI has also held several meetings at ministries, embassies and other significant international organisations. These have included meetings at the ministerial level and with heads of diplomatic missions, which were attended by representatives of EMUNI. In fact, academic diplomacy is one of the most highly-regarded areas at EMUNI, as expressed in the Annual Diplomatic Forum, which took place in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in 2010.

In its first year of operation, EMUNI worked on various projects with the aim of promoting intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region and developing a solid basis for activities with the potential to become annual events, such as Research Souk and EMUNI HE&R.

In addition, it has acted as the co-sponsor of several seminars and conference events dealing with the field of higher education and research in the Euro-Mediterranean and the UfM's priority areas.

The University has cooperated on projects to strengthen and extend the EMUNI network, to obtain additional sources of financing and to promote activities connected with the UfM's six priority issues: de-pollution of the Mediterranean; maritime and land highways; civil protection; alternative energies; higher education and research and the Euro-Mediterranean University; and the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative. EMUNI had participated as a project applicant or project partner. As an applicant, it has sought to forge partnerships for projects among

EMUNI partner institutions whose profiles match the projects' aims and eligibility criteria.

Higher education, science and technology in the Mediterranean have been targeted by many institutions in their endeavour to internationalise with the "Sea of Knowledge". It is crucial for the 43 member states of the UfM to draw up a "road map" to enhance cooperation in higher education and scientific research and promote the creation of knowledge-based societies in Euro-Mediterranean countries. Such a road map was outlined by Mohamed Ghannouchi, Prime Minister of Tunisia, at the opening of the second "Mediterranean Meeting," held in Hammamet, Tunisia, in May 2010. It includes a plan for joint projects in scientific research and technological innovation to be carried out by strengthening ties and partnerships between research centres and units on both sides of the Mediterranean. It will establish a Euro-Mediterranean network based on the full exploitation of patents, boosting cooperation and the exchange of expertise between technological clusters in Partner Countries. It will also promote development-related research units within economic enterprises, particularly those operating in promising sectors and innovative activities. The projected road map provides for strengthened ties and cooperation between academic institutions through exchange programmes for students and teachers and the establishment of equivalences between joint university degrees, as well as by boosting collaboration in the certification of skills for higher education graduates in scientific and technical sectors.

The Union has initiated higher education, science and technology projects, including the inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia. It has also created a number of research centres and developed university networks.

Projects include de-polluting the Mediterranean Sea, drawing up a Mediterranean solar plan to generate energy from the sun and limit greenhouse gas emissions, reducing the vulnerability of energy systems, and improving access to energy for isolated communities.

Meanwhile, the second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in the field of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, postponed because of air-traffic disruption in April, will take place in Brdo, Slovenia, on a date to be announced. The conference will provide an opportunity to advance in the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area, take stock of the activities carried out since the first meeting in Cairo, Egypt, on 18 June 2007, and endorse an action plan to achieve significant progress in coming years. The Cairo Declaration, en-

dorsed by the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, established the framework for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in higher education and research. At the UfM Ministerial Conference held in Marseille on 4 November 2008, the Ministers looked forward to the implementation and follow-up of the Cairo Declaration through the reinforcement of the role of the Monitoring Committee for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in RTD (MoCo) and the prompt creation of an expert group on higher education with a specific mandate to promote the actions and meet the objectives set out in the Declaration. Building on these foundations, the preparation process at the expert level was successfully concluded in Alicante, Spain, in early March 2010, when the respective delegations finalised the conference paper to be adopted by the Ministers at the second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in April 2010 in Slovenia.

The conference, which will convene for the first time under the framework of the UfM, intends to address the urgent challenges and opportunities that the UfM has identified. With the Cairo Declaration as its framework, and in line with the sectors established by the Marseille and Paris Declarations, EMUNI will need to direct its efforts towards advancing cooperation in high-priority areas with great potential through an ad-hoc action plan with tangible proposals.

It should also be noted that the five countries of the Arab Maghreb Union – Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia – and five European countries – France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain – agreed to create a Mediterranean Sustainable Development Observatory under the Oran Declaration. This was approved at the first "5+5" Ministerial Conference on the Environment and Renewable Energies held in Oran, Algeria, in April. The observatory, proposed by Algeria, will be located in a 40-hectare garden on the Oran coast. It will monitor environmental preparations for sustainable development, as well as the formulation and harmonisation of member countries' plans for climate change. The observatory will also provide scientific information, diagnostics and scenario building for development policies concerning information sharing, increased cooperation and the coordination of response strategies.

Harmonisation and synergy will be the two key words in future to ensure that the various efforts financed by Erasmus Mundus, the Tempus Programme, the RD Framework programme and the initiatives undertaken under the ENPI commitments lead to concrete activities, to be agreed by the Union for the Mediterranean, that can significantly advance its joint efforts to create a Euro-Mediterranean Area of Higher Education and Research.