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Universities for Europe

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT OPINION

of the
Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion
on
Universities for Europe
(own-initiative opinion)

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Rapporteur: **Mr Van Iersel**

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To the members of the Study Group on **Universities for Europe**
(Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion)

N.B.: This document will be discussed at the meeting on **Monday 7 September 2009 beginning at 10.00 a.m.** To allow time for translation, any amendments must be submitted in writing to the section secretariat no later than 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 2 September
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Universities for Europe

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On 5 March 2009 the European Economic and Social Committee decided, under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

Universities for Europe
(own-initiative opinion).

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on … The rapporteur was **Mr Van Iersel**.

At its ... plenary session, held on … (meeting of ...), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by ... votes to ... with ... abstentions.

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 In the view of the EESC universities have an essential role in a well functioning knowledge triangle: education, research, innovation, and should be perceived as key for sustainable socio-economic developments in Europe.

1.2 Since the Bologna Conference in 1999, and later the Lisbon Strategy, universities became increasingly a priority at EU-level. In spite of setting new targets by Member States and Universities, there is a growing feeling of uneasiness among academics and in society about the fragmentation of European higher education and about the speed of needed reforms.

1.3 The EESC underlines the need of reforming European universities, as worldwide economic, technological and educational developments, and the current crisis ask for better value for money, an improved environment and increased opportunities for students, lecturers and researchers.

1.4 The necessary adjustments include greater autonomy and accountability of universities, the extension of the ways of funding, increased transparency and openness, partnerships with the business community, the promotion of (world-class) excellence in teaching and research, and adequate human resources management practices.

1.5 The EESC emphasises the need of a European methodology to assess performance and to collect comparable data. A European assessment should be the result of an in-depth study by

independent experts and should go beyond 'citations', embracing a broad range of multidimensional indicators, among these education and teaching , research, innovation, connections, 'mapping' of specialisations, interdisciplinary competences, and services to students. An overall assessment should also include institutional links between universities and research institutes[1].

1.6 Up-to-date and comparable standards for education and research should, in addition to a broad basis that facilitates multidisciplinary developments and new combinations, foster diversity and specialisation among universities, thereby replacing homogeneity and similarity.

1.7 The EESC advocates a coherent integration of universities in a revamped Lisbon Strategy in the framework of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area[2].

1.8 Students and scholars should be offered increased opportunities to pursue cross-disciplinary careers in Europe. This implies, among others, a practice of open recruitment and a charter of researchers which is connected to the introduction of the 'fifth freedom', i.e. free circulation of knowledge, while maintaining diversity of approaches and competition to reach the best results.

1.9 A Europe-wide open approach towards third-country academic teachers, researchers and students, and scientifically leading universities should be addressed.

1.10 The EESC advocates the establishment of advisory Educational Platforms at EU- and national level, including civil society representatives. Both world class and regional centres of excellence should be engaged with embedded in their surrounding society and regions. This may also foster an entrepreneurial spirit in universities and be supportive to economic and knowledge clusters.

1.11 An independent role and position of universities, as was the case long ago, will encourage and strengthen them as intellectual drivers for Europe. European approaches to education and lecturing, science and top research should not be limited to the broadening and deepening of European R&D, innovation and teaching. They should be extended to other competences and disciplines as well, e.g. medical research and practice, socio-economic sciences, and humanities.

1.12 The Commission should remain supportive and have a visible and active role in this process.

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1 It has to be noted that in some European countries, notably in France and Germany, most of the research is realised in research institutions with close links to universities, that should be further encouraged.

2 See also EESC opinion on "The road to the European knowledge-based society", OJ C 65 of 17.03.2006, p. 94, a plea for "a Common European Area of Knowledge, based on intensified cooperation in Learning, Innovation and Research".

1.13 The EESC does not consider an intensified connection between universities and the EU as a technical affair. It should not be limited to the economic sector either, however crucial. At stake is a horizon beyond, the overall significance of universities for lifelong learning education and intellectual life, for society, for civilisation.

1.14 The founding fathers and their successors had their reasons to keep Education out of the treaty of Rome, but we are living in different times now. National sovereignty and diversity have to go parallel with the acknowledgement that the EU as such has to be an equal partner and competitor at world scale. Universities are vital partners to that end.

1.15 In other words, universities as institutions should be encouraged to develop from outsiders to insiders in European integration.

2. Introduction

2.1 Throughout history universities have played a prominent role in the development of European society. They used to be at the very centre of intellectual life and they have been in many respects drivers of progress.

2.2 As scholars and academics moved freely across the continent among self-governing universities, they greatly influenced visions, and views on all sorts of societal phenomena and developments. Through their significance in education they could mould generations of circles and personalities that were decisive for shaping European society politically, socially and economically.

2.3 When from the 18th century onward the nation-state progressively came into existence, universities became to a large extent institutions, providing national education and serving national interests in science and research. This development got deeply rooted. Notwithstanding increasing internationalisation, higher education and even science and technology in universities are to a certain extent still nationally driven.

2.4 Political interference became progressively the order of the day. Education systems at all levels are now based on and organised by national political decision-making. Higher education got everywhere a clear national mark, resulting in a broad variety of national-based institutional provisions. It is characterised by manifold and complicated institutional diversities, and often educational similarity.

2.5 Important elements in this diversified European picture are institutional frameworks, classifications, financial arrangements, governance, the degree of autonomy, and the nomination and career development of professors and researchers.

2.6 As science is borderless, academics and researchers themselves became increasingly part of European and world-wide networks. Consequently, research programmes are tending to

internationalise as well, although on a rather limited scale. With a notable exception, however, we find that private higher education, especially business schools, is by definition more international both in scope and in approach.

2.7 The Treaty of Rome and subsequent Treaties have no chapter "Education". At the time no correlation was seen between economic integration and education. Education remained nationally based and fully subjected to "subsidiarity". Any decision concerning education at European level takes place in an intergovernmental framework.

2.8 Nonetheless, parts of the education sector could gradually no longer be seen as distinct from the integration process as was originally intended. Strongly endorsed by the social partners, this started with those educational aspects that were most directly linked with the economy and the labour market, i.e. improvement of skills and vocational training.

2.9 In 1986 a European students exchange programme, Erasmus, started. This contributed also to the internationalisation of curricula of students. In 2009 Erasmus was extended with Erasmus Mundus. Special programmes to be mentioned are Comett, an exchange programme between universities and companies in the field of technology, Marie Curie, an exchange programme for researchers, and Socrates, focused on Life long learning.

2.10 A big leap forward for universities took place in 1999, when the ministers of Education of 29 countries adopted the Bologna Declaration, amongst others introducing a pan-European structure of university degrees "bachelor" and "master", a system of accumulation and transfer of credits, mobility, recognition of degrees, and European quality assurance.

2.11 The Bologna Process now encompasses 46 Members across the European continent. The over-arching objective is the creation of a European Higher Education Area. During the last decade the subjects in discussion increased substantially. The priorities of the Bologna Process are: the introduction of the three cycle degree system – bachelor/master/doctorate – with increased emphasis on doctoral studies and research, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, periods of studies, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), lifelong learning, the social dimension of higher education, mobility of students and staff, and on exploring the external dimension of European higher education area.

2.12 The Lisbon Strategy puts a strong emphasis on the connection between knowledge and competitiveness. It worked as a catalyst. It helped to drive universities from the margin to the centre of Community thinking. An increasing number of research and innovation projects, initiated by the Commission, resulted in broader international cooperation within Europe.

2.13 For the same reasons in several Communications the Commission set the agenda for discussions on the reform and modernisation of universities[3].

2.14 Reforms of the framework and of the Universities are going on across Europe at varying pace.

2.15 The renewed Lisbon Strategy in 2005 gave also rise to new initiatives to mobilise universities. The Council's decisions to establish the European Research Council (ERC, 2007), and the European Institute of Technology and Innovation (EIT, 2008) are most important. In the same vein is the Green Paper 'The European Research Area: New Perspectives'[4]

2.16 A special case in point is the European Charter and Code of Conduct on the mobility and free market of Researchers in 2005[5]. The Charter and the Code were signed by 800 higher education institutions. The implementation, however, shows that many institutions do not apply the agreement, sometimes because of a specific and successful tradition. Therefore, the implementation of Charter and Code should respect a certain diversity of approaches.

2.17 The Commission is working on a European label to encourage the implementation.

2.18 An effective engagement of European universities in European integration is a long lasting process. Academics, scientists, and students are increasingly taking part in international dynamics, but universities as institutions remain often hampered by traditions and national arrangements. Developments are also slowed down by the fact that "Education" as such is still not a theme in the European Treaty.

2.19 World-wide networking between academics and researchers is extending due to the interaction of universities, research institutes and multinational companies. This trend is also reflected in the Community programmes.

2.20 This Opinion will focus on new trends and framework conditions to engage universities more effectively and visibly in European integration. Universities, in line with their longstanding historical vocation, should not only be pushed by the Lisbon Agenda, but should themselves become major catalysts of the process.

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3 Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy, COM(2005) 152 final. Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation, COM(2006) 208 final. A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue, COM(2009) 158 final..

4 This Green Paper of April 2007 focuses on six fields to develop the ERA: researchers, international cooperation, joint research programmes, research infrastructures, knowledge transfer and intellectual property.

5 Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005, adopted by the Council…

3. General observations

3.1 During the last decades initiatives and programmes to promote internationalisation of higher education in Europe have been intensified due to the emphasis on the knowledge-based society.

3.2 In the EESC's view universities should visibly be associated in the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy. This objective will generate new impulses and create hitherto hidden opportunities for a knowledge based society.

3.3 International analyses are unanimous that given the speed of technology and innovation as well as enhanced competition the European academic world at large is insufficiently prepared to play its full part and tends, in relative terms, even to loose ground[6].

3.4 The EU has more tertiary graduates than US and Japan since 2000[7]. But the EU as whole is not using this qualified human resource in an effective way.

3.5 The goal must be optimal talent development and equal access – including the transition between different levels of (higher) education, and life-long learning – across Europe, avoiding any discrimination.The public missions of universities in Europe are to be maintained and are no impediment to guarantee quality and excellence[8].

3.6 Despite all variations which may also imply substantial differences in quality of academic results, analyses show that there are common characteristics across Europe that should be scrutinised. In the framework of this Opinion it is worth to highlight the following:

3.6.1 The degree of autonomy. The picture is tremendously complex. Although there is a trend to give increased autonomy to universities, on average the interference of public authorities remains dominant[9]. A lack of sufficient autonomy and accountability tends to confirm traditional perspectives and over-regulation. Public structure should not delay autonomy[10].

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6 See among others "The future of European Universities, Renaissance or Decay" by Richard Lambert and Nick Butler, Centre for European Reform, June 2006, and "High Aspirations, Agenda for reforming Universities", Breugel, August 2008. It says on page VII that the authors "address higher education and set forth an ambitious agenda for it in their conviction that the upgrading of universities is one of the key levers of Europe's growth performance". Against this backdrop the EESC welcomes the recent Prague Declaration 2009 of the European University Association that, besides a firm message to Political Leaders, identifies 10 very relevant success factors for European universities in the next decade.

7 In 2005 the EU has produced 100.000 doctoral degrees compared 53.000 in the US and 15.000 in Japan.

8 In this respect it is noteworthy that Berkeley University, the 3rd ranked university in the US, is a public institution.

9 Sometimes there is even a fall back. An illustrative case in point is the University Law, 2003, in Denmark which, by increasing political influence, reduced the autonomy of researchers and universities considerably.

10 Besides 'autonomy' attention must be given to 'self-government' of universities.

Goals should be a better preparation of students to the labour market and a more effective attitude to research and to innovation.

3.6.2 The way of funding. Here again, the picture is very diverse, but on the whole public funding is decisive[11]. This makes higher education and research as a rule very much dependent on political priorities among many other ones, which often results in under-funding. Moreover, there is too little incentive for diversification of funding sources, such as funding by foundations and companies, and introducing tuition fees, with the addition of grants and loans[12].

3.6.3 The lack of transparency. By lack of reliable comparable data on universities, students and researchers alike are not able to identify relevant competences and courses in Europe. A European methodology to classifications as a transparency tool is a crucial aspect. This would encourage shared knowledge and collaboration in available educational and research programmes across Europe as well as adequate information and quality. This may stimulate overall mobility of both students and researchers.

3.7 As education and higher education are an exclusive national responsibility, it does not automatically encourage in universities an attitude to look beyond own horizons and national borders. The outcome is a fragmented pattern of higher education institutions that in a number of cases is more or less closed to the dynamics of the outside world.

3.8 Moreover, fragmentation is maintained by diverging quality requirements – also in applying the "bachelor/master" model – not too attractive labour conditions, and often weak financial arrangements, which are blocking openness, shared academic values, and cross-border mobility except for the top.

3.9 Low autonomy tends to breed similarity and homogeneity among universities. It rather promotes in a number of countries "general" university courses and research facilities instead of heterogeneity and qualified specialisation.

3.10 Research and innovation programmes, frequently defined by national innovation platforms, are mainly national-based, and as a rule not embedded in broader perspectives. Overlaps and varying calendars and agendas confirm fragmentation and, consequently, prevent specialisation across the continent.

3.11 It is not a fertile ground for attracting researchers and top lecturers from abroad, neither from other Member States nor from the rest of the world. Furthermore, the brain drain to the US is

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11 An unwanted by-effect is that only a limited number of universities has an accurate calculation of their overall costs.

12 The EESC refers to the Commission: tuition fees can be incorporated, provided that they are accompanied with grants and loans to guarantee equal access.

a constant worry. Meanwhile the Chinese are promoting their own highly specialised top-universities. India will follow.

3.12 Several European groupings of universities coordinate increasingly views on the need for better conditions for R&D and potential capacities of knowledge and innovation[13]. Joint research programmes is a promising tool for cooperation and to fight fragmentation.

3.13 The Bologna declaration of 1999, aiming at creating a European Higher Education area by 2010 making it more competitive through reforms, was followed in 2006 by a new wake-up call of the Commission[14]. The Commission rightly concludes that "this crucial sector of the economy and of society needs in-depth restructuring and modernisation if Europe is not to lose out in the global competition in education, research and innovation"[15].

3.14 Adjustments take place, but at a too low speed. Moreover, national policies towards regulating universities are differing considerably between Member States.

3.15 Today's discussions in academic circles prove that the pace of progress towards the European area is too slow. Also the EESC broadly subscribes to the need of a higher educated and international oriented professional population in Europe to respond to future societal requirements and competitiveness.

3.16 The cost of non-Europe may be huge. In conclusion of these observations the EESC advocates that the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy 2010 should include a targeted modernisation of and cooperation between universities, better European coordination and real transparency through classifications.

4. The need of new perspectives

4.1 The Lisbon Strategy aims at striking the balance between convergence and coordination at EU-level and the preservation of national competences by defining common objectives and promoting comparable programmes and policies across Europe. In the EESC's view universities as key actors regarding education, research and innovation should get a well defined place in the Lisbon Agenda.

4.2 Just now, in the current crisis, an increasing emphasis on education and innovation in the broadest sense, especially in the current crisis, which should open new avenues and

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13 League of European Research Universities, Coimbra Group, IDEA League, RISE.

14 Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation", May 2006, COM(2006) 208 final. See also Communication "Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy", April 2005, COM(2005) 152 final.

15 COM(2006) 208 final, page 11.

opportunities, is needed. Ongoing R&D and applied technology programmes, and enhanced exchanges of students and lecturers should be guaranteed across Europe.

4.3 Against this backdrop the EESC emphasises that to increase the transparency there is an urgent need of developing comparable data[16] and a reliable European methodology to assess and compare the performance of universities in various dimensions, e.g. education, research and innovation. It must be realised that in view of the desired heterogeneity, specialisation and diversity such data cannot be compiled in a simple manner. Application of various methods can improve the methodology and the development of criteria. Cooperation with the OECD is desirable.

4.4 The programmes, mentioned in chapter 2, are a substantial support for trans-border exchanges. The establishment of the European Research Council (ERC) is a leap forward. The ERC as a driver of research projects must be supportive to the internationalisation of universities. Research funding and the execution of research must remain strictly divided activities.

4.5 One of the by-effects of the ERC is the emphasis on improving the cross-border mobility of researchers by the introduction of the so-called "fifth freedom". A full application of the Charter for Researchers and Code for their Recruitment is closely linked with the 'fifth freedom'[17]. To that end facilities in universities and better administrative and fiscal framework conditions are badly needed[18].

4.6 The establishment of the European Technology Institute (ETI) is yet another important step. ETI should support links and alliances. In parallel, better European coordination among university programmes should be established. The new proposal of the Commission for the establishment of a Business – University Forum is a next important step.

4.7 So far, universities and research institutes are not as such addressed in the Five Partnerships Initiatives, stated by the Council, to develop the European Research Area (ERA). In fact, among the six axes, proposed in the Green Paper to develop the ERA[19] all but universities

16 In these data must be included the various funding/sponsoring schemes and agencies for R&D as well as the role of the cooperation and engagement with research organisations and industrial companies outside the universities need to be accounted for.

17 See note 3.

18 The significance of mobility of students was underlined once again in the Communiqué on the Bologna Process 2020 of April 2009 in which the Ministers stipulated that by '2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad'.

19 See note 2.

(and, in general, research institutions) were taken to deepen cooperation. This does not correspond with the EESC's view on universities in the Lisbon Strategy[20].

4.8 In the same vein, the conditions for large scale research facilities (CERN) across Europe and other joint research centers which link university groups, should be improved. Large infrastructures imply a critical mass and many committed researchers which may attract extra financial resources.

4.9 In the EESC's view the current crisis should be a new starting-point with coherent and sustainable perspectives to maintain Europe as a valuable competitor and partner in science and technology.

5. In response to a dynamic context

5.1 Commitment of Member States and Universities

5.1.1 The three pillars education, science and innovation require a clear-cut commitment of Member States. Secondly, they require also full participation of universities in their own right. Finally, they should entail the participation of the private sector. The best results will be obtained in a flexible top-down and bottom-up process among many stakeholders.

5.1.2 It must be taken into account that global networking, the dynamics of technology and research, targeted specialisation, and footloose talent create a new field of play for (national) universities which enables them to look for new horizons[21].

5.1.3 This is not to undermine cultural diversity, on the contrary. National and regional diversities are Europe's precious asset. But it is clear that the diversity of the landscape and its off-shoots will be better served by an over-arching strategy of common analyses and agreed objectives to open still existing barriers, and to foster quality, and specialisation.

5.1.4 Before all, a common orientation and a common mindset are needed among higher education institutions, including common academic values, cultural and academic openness, less administrative bureaucracy, cross-border channels, transparency on professional qualifications and results, trans-border technological projects, trans-border mobility. All this can be realised in maintaining cultural diversity.

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20 For viewpoints of Member States and the approach of the EESC, see the Public Consultation Results on the Green Paper, April 2008, page 20 and following.

21 See, amongst others, Prof. H. Wissema 'The Third Generation Universities', a description of modern challenges and opportunities for universities. It is illustrated by concrete examples, such as Cambridge University and Louvain University.

5.1.5 Increasing autonomy and self-government, more flexibility and reliability in funding, and transparency will enhance initiatives to modernisation by universities themselves. They will provoke a bottom-up process for higher standards, better quality and specialisation.

5.1.6 European demography should be a strong incentive to adjust the system of higher education both for European students and for talented people from third countries. Without adjustment there will be substantial deficits in the future. Europe needs a higher percentage of highly qualified people to foster productivity by research, knowledge dissemination and innovative capacity.

5.1.7 It has to be kept in mind that even the US is only able to maintain their leading position in a number of fields because of the attractiveness of their universities to people from abroad.

5.2 **Transparent field of play and quality assessment**

5.2.1 The knowledge-based society, outlined in the Lisbon Strategy, demands a higher degree of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral education and research in order to replace mono-disciplinarity.

5.2.2 Fostering a transparent field of play for universities, will instead of creating uniformity respond to the need of differentiation and specialisation. The latter will also provoke co-funding by the private sector where it is desirable[22].

5.2.3 Against this backdrop, the EESC highly welcomes the recent initiative of the Commission to set up a European methodology to assess performance of universities. It should also contain a reliable "mapping" of specialisations in addition to the too one-dimensional "Shanghai-list". European ranking should be the result of an in depth evaluation procedure by selected experts and should, besides 'citations', embrace interdisciplinary competences, education and teaching quality, student services and low cost accommodations. There is a need of multi-dimensional European assessment methods to assess university delivery[23].

5.2.4 "Mapping" will probably foster focused transborder mobility among students, lecturers, professors and researchers. It will respond to the trend among students to look for the best courses in their particular field, and consequently encourage potential talents.

5.2.5 It will also help to upgrade mediocre research by creating new networks, and a collaborative and competitive attitude across Europe. These networks and new alliances between poles of

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22 The US example shows that transparency, differentiation and specialisation make that every researcher and scientist in the world knows which university in the US is best equipped in each particular field. These basic conditions promote also co-funding by the private sector and foundations.

23 See footnote 1.

excellence will give rise to a number of high-standing interconnections and pave the way for new solutions.

5.3 **Influences from outside and interconnections**

5.3.1 In search of needed new solutions, private funding may accelerate the trend of problem-oriented research, which as a method is becoming increasingly successful in the US. In general increasing private funding must be considered because of diminishing public budgets and more demanding financial requirements.

5.3.2 Actual dynamics in research and technology underline the need of adjustments and modernisation. If universities do not find ways and means to overcome the challenges, privately based universities are likely to take over and may make too traditionally run universities obsolete.

5.3.3 A European coordination of national innovation programmes in which universities take part, can be beneficial and productive. As yet these programmes, often defined by national Innovation platforms, are mainly based on national specialities and focusing on national priorities. Consequently, they usually take too little into account the broader European agenda or calendar nor do they consider overlaps or desirable spill-over effects in a European context.

5.3.4 Certainly, the Joint Technological Initiatives, public-private projects defined and co-financed at European level, can also be supportive in this respect.

5.3.5 A successful national programme in this respect that can be a useful example for European applications and improvement of Europe-wide scientific achievements, is the German Excellence Initiative of 2005[24].

5.3.6 A Lisbon agenda for universities will, in addition to already existing European programmes with their own incentives, increase competitiveness in higher education at a broader scale, and provoke excellence.

5.3.7 According to the EESC the introduction of advisory Educational platforms at European level[25] – by analogy with the Technology platforms – can be helpful to discuss education programming and the education agenda for Europe, like the needs of the European labour

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24 The Excellence Initiative, 2005, intends to promote Germany as a more attractive research location, making it more competitive and focusing attention in the outstanding achievements of German universities and the German scientific community. It supports top-level research. The programme is funded with € 1.9 billion for 2006-2011.

25 "Educational platforms" were proposed during the University Business Forum on February 6th 2009 by Mr F.A. van Vught, former chairmen of the board of Twente University. It is interesting to nota that in Finland legislation on universities is limited, whereas tripartite surveillance has a substantial impact.

market, desirable competences, accreditation, practicalities around life long learning, qualifications and professional profiles, modern education methods etc.

5.3.8 These advisory platforms should, beyond academic circles, be extended to non state actors - social partners and civil society.

5.4 **Facilitating mobility**

5.4.1 For younger generations Europe as an entity is a reality. Reliable and transparent information at European scale on the best courses in each field and also on the specialisation of universities and faculties will fulfil expectations of many youngsters and will foster cross-border exchange. Students and scholars should be offered increased opportunities to pursue a cross-disciplinary career in Europe.

5.4.2 Obstacles to specialisation, a fertile ground for exchanges of young talented researchers, should be scrutinised at European level. By raising awareness and creating European hubs of research and educational excellence, a constructive field of play among European universities is being encouraged.

5.4.3 A future-oriented Europe-wide approach towards third-country researchers and students would be highly desirable. Some countries are already on their way[26].

5.4.4 In itself, diverging labour contracts do not pose special problems. Diverging secondary labour conditions, however, may be an impediment, e.g. special national provisions regarding social security arrangements. The actual examination of possibilities for a pan-European pension fund for researchers is highly welcome. The principles underlined in the Commission Communication on European Partnership for Researchers should be encouraged[27].

5.4.5 A special case in point are budgeting programmes and projects. As terms of reference and administrative procedures are diverging from country to country, these should be scrutinised to facilitate internationalisation.

5.4.6 Facilitating mobility, in its turn, will foster the attractiveness of existing, but also of new centres and clusters of knowledge in Europe. These will promote interdisciplinary activities and they will reinforce badly needed interconnections between science and the private sector as emphasised by the Commission[28].

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26 An example is The Netherlands. There are around 10 000 Ph.D. students of which 30% is non-Dutch.

27 Add COM doc nr + subjects.

28 See footnote 1.

5.5 **The regional dimension**

5.5.1 Economic clusters, connecting universities, research centers and the private sector, are as a rule strong region-based spearheads. Clusters can also be very helpful to foster further regional development. Regions and universities should be encouraged to cooperate more effectively.

5.5.2 Practical experience shows that an extension of poles of excellence with top research and lecturing deepens cooperation with companies in regions and metropolitan areas[29]. The process of embedding universities and their specialities more visibly in their natural environment will be beneficial for growth and jobs in large urbanised areas.

5.5.3 Specialisation and diversity create different paths to excellence. Some universities compete and cooperate at world level, others are regional centres of excellence.

5.5.4 All universities must be encouraged to be engaged with the surrounding society. In addition to their core missions of education and teaching, there is a need to further develop third stream activities such as knowledge and innovation sharing with society, community engagement, life long learning, and relevance to regional and local development.

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29 Among many examples can be mentioned Cambridge, Eindhoven, Stuttgart, and the Öresund region.