



‘Taking forward the higher education and research agenda between Latin America and Europe’,

Dialogue between Latin-America, Caribbean and European universities and university associations

Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

4-6 February 2010

Input for EU-LAC Summit

The conference ***Taking forward the higher education and research agenda between Latin America and Europe¹, Cartagena, Colombia, 4-6 February, 2010*** was organized by the Association of Colombian Universities (ASCUN), the European University Association (EUA) and the Observatory of Relations between Latin America and Europe (OBREAL), with the support of the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar (the host), the Universidad de Cartagena, the Colombian Ministry of National Education, the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Erasmus Mundus Programme, and the Presidency's Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (Acción Social). It was attended by representatives of universities and university associations of both regions.

The following statement was prepared by the participants as an input to the further development of the EU-LAC² Higher Education and Knowledge Area, for consideration by the upcoming EU-LAC Heads of State and Government Summit in Madrid.

¹ For an audiovisual summary of the event, please visit www.obreal.org

² The Spanish version will use *Espacio ALCUE (América Latina y el Caribe - Unión Europea) de Educación Superior (ALCUE)*

I. Enhancement of the EU-LAC Higher Education and Knowledge Area

1. Universities with their multiple missions are increasingly responsive to societal needs and play a critical role at local, national, regional and international level. For these reasons universities can make an important contribution to many of the priority areas of the EU-LAC Partnership: environment, energy, technology and innovation, employment and, more generally, sustainable development at national and global level.
2. The EU-LAC Higher Education and Knowledge Area still has a considerable way to go in reaching the objectives set at its launch ten years ago. The continued political will to develop the process, as evidenced by the recent Communication of the European Commission³ and the forthcoming EU-LAC Summit of Heads of State and Government, is welcomed. However, the **development of a roadmap outlining medium and long-term goals** for the EU-LAC Education and Knowledge Area as well as concrete measures required to meet these goals is considered to be crucial to ensure tangible progress in the years to come.
3. The further realisation of the EU-LAC Education and Knowledge Area also requires the full involvement of the academic communities of Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean as active partners in defining the objectives of the overarching policy process and in taking it forward. This is crucial to ensure ownership by the higher education and research community of both continents, and thus full commitment. The example of the Bologna Process in Europe clearly illustrates the vital importance and creative potential of balancing top-down with bottom-up approaches, and could be a source of inspiration.

- II. The development of the EU-LAC Education and Knowledge Area is favoured by the existence of two regional processes of integration embracing higher education. Europe has made progress over the last decade as evidenced by the Bologna process and the launch of the European Higher Education Area in March this year, and is also addressing the international dimension and thus the articulation of the EHEA with higher education in other world regions. For Latin America and the Caribbean, there have been valuable initiatives like the *Espacio de Encuentro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Educación Superior (ENLACES)* agreed by LAC governments, LAC universities and LAC stakeholders' during the last *Conferencia Regional de Educación Superior (CRES 2008)*. However, all these initiatives have yet to find a comprehensive regional policy framework in order to promote mobility, cooperation and exchange between universities in LAC,

III. Suggestions for Action

1. In addition to establishment of clear policy goals, the provision of funding is key for the realisation of the EU-LAC higher education area. The focus should be on continuing and improving existing programmes, rather than creating new ones. Funding tools should
 - a. not be prescriptive, but enable universities to develop a broad range of mutually beneficial cooperation and exchange schemes, in line with their specific missions;

³ 'The European Union and Latin America: Global Players in Partnership' (2009)

- b. take account of the need to promote more balanced mobility, for example through providing incentives to encourage the exchange of highly qualified faculty and students in both directions thus facilitating brain circulation between the two HE areas;
 - c. continue to further university-to-university cooperation and individual student and staff mobility (in particular ALFA and Erasmus Mundus) to foster both inter- and intra-regional partnerships;
 - d. be made available in order to strengthen relationships between university associations, student organisations, quality assurance agencies, etc., so as to contribute to strengthening links and facilitating dialogue and thus ensuring active participation of the entire higher education community; the consolidation of this intermediate level of biregional relationships will contribute to the improvement of both intergovernmental and University-to-University relations;
 - e. promote the linkages between intraregional and interregional partnerships in order to promote knowledge transfer and institutional capacity building; strengthening regional and bi-regional cooperation in quality assurance; development of curricula that are responsive to the needs of students and take account of societal demands, and enhance mutual recognition and transparency.
2. Doctoral education should be a strategic focus, including building joint degrees at doctoral level, both between LAC institutions and with European institutions. Such cooperation should be fostered as a way of promoting internationalization and as a means to build teaching and research capacity, and to reinforce the link between the HE and research agendas in the two regions.
3. It was pointed out at the conference that while university associations exist in almost all LAC countries, and also at sub regional level as well as at an all-American level, the cooperation between university associations at regional level, embracing the whole Latin America and the Caribbean should be strengthened. Such a regional cooperation should be encouraged by LAC Governments but also by EU-LAC biregional specific projects promoting cooperation between university associations. The complementarity between regional and biregional initiatives could contribute to developing regional higher education cooperation and integration in LAC, and would be vital to the EU-LAC HE and Knowledge Area.