

Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Higher education, Research and Innovation

25 January 2022

Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, Paris

Background document – Morning session

Workshops

This session is made up of two workshops aimed at illustrating and giving food for thought about the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of European higher education, research and innovation in the global competition. Based on talks by Collège de France professors from various disciplinary and geographical backgrounds, the ministers are invited to discuss the future of universities and the values and principles of research.

Workshop 1. The Europe of universities: Which future?

In the coming years, the growth in higher education enrolment observed worldwide over the past decades will continue to intensify. Demographic trends and changes in the geopolitical context call into question Europe's position as a global centre of knowledge creation. A large number of factors, threats and opportunities will influence the future development of higher education institutions in Europe. Among these, the global challenge of climate change and environmental degradation, the acceleration of technological and digital change are already having an impact on the strategies and positioning of universities. At the same time, the growing demand for quality education in emerging countries is increasing the speed and number of global exchanges, while new threats are emerging to the fundamental values and principles that European democracies aim to defend. On a regional and global scale, the increase of inequalities and the challenges of ageing societies will transform the

labour market and reinforce the need for inclusion, involving new expectations for lifelong learning.

In this respect, it is crucial to support the transformation of Europe's higher education sector to contribute to the EU's key priorities, including the Green Deal for Europe, the Digital Decade, the Global Gateway Strategy, the Industrial Strategy, the Skills Strategy and the Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion. Europe's universities have a major role to play in European leadership, recovery and belonging. Developing and strengthening their cooperation, partnerships and alliances at European and global level will be key to this.

In January 2022, the Commission is presenting an ambitious European strategy for universities, which gives new impetus to the realisation of European education and research areas in the coming years.

How can we respond to these challenges, and how can the EU, with its strong experience, lead the way?

Workshop 2. Principles and values of research in Europe and in the world

The need to strengthen the European Union's strategic autonomy has been further accentuated by the health crisis. In order to face the challenges of tomorrow, the Union must take on a leading role in research and innovation, particularly in strategic areas such as artificial intelligence or epidemiology. The European scale makes it possible to provide answers to the new challenges of the 21st century, such as pandemics, global warming and the green and digital transitions.

The European Union and its Member States are seeking to develop more focused and balanced international partnerships. Horizon Europe, the new research and innovation framework programme for 2021-2027, is one of the tools that can be used to achieve this objective. The European Missions approach and the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, adopted on 26 November 2021 by the Member States, are another step in this direction. The Pact establishes a common set of principles and values that Member States have committed themselves to follow in their R&I systems and in their interactions with third countries in order to achieve a level playing field and common framework conditions. These values and principles include ethics and integrity of research and innovation, freedom of scientific research, gender equality and equal opportunities, pursuit of excellence, and free circulation of researchers and support staff, scientific knowledge and technology.

In this perspective, the importance for Europe of reciprocity and shared values is reaffirmed in order to develop scientific cooperation without being naive, and to establish balanced scientific and technological cooperation agreements. In this

respect, international partnerships and the influence of the Union in the fields of research and innovation represent a tool for influence and soft power.

How can we better articulate all these issues without undermining the creativity of researchers? How can we make the social responsibility of scientific research performers of today and tomorrow visible and understandable in the European Union and beyond?