

## European Global Approach revisited - position paper by Aurora

### 1. Short explanation why Aurora gives its opinion

The European Union (EU) wants to play a meaningful and positive role in the world at large. This requires both competitiveness and collaboration to tackle global challenges as pointed out in the international cooperation strategy published in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Europe needs to cooperate at international level with a strong, qualitative high level of research and innovation to get access to the best people, ideas and facilities. The European Commission (EC) pointed out in its work programme for 2021 that a renewal of the current strategy for international cooperation is needed<sup>2</sup>. The EC wants to co-create the international cooperation strategy based on current prioritised European themes, global challenges, geo-political considerations as well as integral inclusion of education in this strategy. This aligns with the vision of the **Aurora Universities Network: matching academic excellence (against global standards) with societal relevance towards global sustainability and well-being**<sup>3</sup>. The Aurora partners actually work together as higher education institutions (HEIs) with students and society around the world to learn from each other and to become better at what we care about most: learning together and researching for a strong and bright future for students, researchers, businesses, policymakers and the wider society, contributing to achieving global challenges. In view of our position on the European Education and Research Areas<sup>4</sup> the Aurora Universities Network provides its advice for a new “Global Approach to research, innovation, education and youth” in eight recommendations. Our perspectives encompass a view from HEIs and their contributions, the role and contribution of Aurora as a group of societally-engaged and comprehensive, research-intensive universities, and the role that European Universities Alliances may exert.

### 2. Short summary of the EU international cooperation strategy

In 2012, the EC published its communication on international cooperation policy<sup>1</sup>. Global challenges were seen as main drivers: scarcity of resources to be cared for sustainably, climate change and infectious diseases as global threats, third countries performing more research and innovation (R&I) that the EU wants to access, and the EU being successful in global competition while preserving its economic interests. Several instruments have been in place to address the international cooperation strategy like European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP2), ITER project on nuclear fusion as viable energy source for the future, Marie Skłodowska Curie activities, the Joint Research Centres that cooperate with international partners, the GEANT e-infrastructure on the interconnection of pan-European research and education networks, and the Human Frontier Science programme funding international cooperation in basic research.

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<sup>1</sup> Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach. COM(2012) 497 final. European Commission, Brussels, 2012. Weblink:

[https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/com\\_2012\\_497\\_communication\\_from\\_commission\\_to\\_inst\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/com_2012_497_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Commission Work Programme 2021. A Union of vitality in a world of fragility. Annexes. European Commission, Brussels, 2020. Annex 1 pt 28. Weblink: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar%3A91ce5c0f-12b6-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_2&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar%3A91ce5c0f-12b6-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF)

<sup>3</sup> Aurora Universities Network Weblink: <https://aurora-network.global/what-we-do/>

<sup>4</sup> European Education Area – European Research Area. Aurora position. Aurora Universities Network, 2020.

Weblink: <https://aurora-network.global/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/European-Education-Area-position-AURORA.pdf>

The current six priorities of the EC focus on the Green Deal, an economy that works for people, the digital fitness and transition, the European way of life, a strong Europe in the world, and a democratic Europe<sup>5</sup>. This includes the strengthening of the European excellence and attractiveness in R&I and education in an inclusive way to tackle European as well as global challenges formulated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). A renewed international cooperation strategy needs to emphasize the Green Deal strategy and Digital transformation. In addition, the recently published communications by the EC on the European Research Area (ERA)<sup>6</sup> and the European Education Area (EEA)<sup>7</sup> supported by the Council of the EU<sup>8</sup> further warrant a revision of the 2012 strategy on international cooperation towards integration of research, innovation with education and youth. Tackling global challenges requires collaboration between education, research and innovation as well as engaging citizens and especially young people. In addition, science policy (or also knowledge diplomacy<sup>9</sup>) strategies that use international cooperation in R&I and education as an instrument of soft power may improve geo-political relationships.

### 3. Aurora position

#### 3.1. Combined effort of R&I and education with UN SDGs as compass

Aurora welcomes an emphasis on the six Commission priorities including the green and digital transition, health, innovation and harmonious Europe in the new international cooperation strategy. Knowledge development related to important topics needs to coincide with education. Only in this way young people will be engaged in this development. HEIs need to combine the best efforts and most dedicated thinkers and learners to navigate and shape the ecological, social and economic transformations. This includes engaging young people with new and creative ideas for their future. We need to improve our transformative literacy. We can do so only if we work together, across sectors as well as with the branches of primary, secondary and tertiary education. This process of knowledge development needs to be inclusive as only in this way we feel that global challenges can be rightly and effectively addressed from the different perspectives, and gain support for all measures and decisions taken and instruments developed. In high-trust cross-European and international academic networks and their respective public-private partnerships we must be sharing our vulnerabilities, learning from our best as well as our weakest efforts. International cooperation in education stimulates a broader perspective of students and teachers on global but also national or local topics and solutions.

*Recommendation #1.* the integral uptake of education and youth in addition to research and innovation in the new global approach strategy. Education and research should be inclusive, take account of diversity and culture, putting people at the centre, while UN SDGs provide the guiding

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5 Six Commission priorities for 2019-2024. European Commission, Brussels, 2019. Weblink:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en)

6 A new ERA for Research and Innovation. COM(2020) 628 final. European Commission, Brussels, 2020. Weblink:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0628&from=EN>

7 Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 – Communication. COM(2020) 625 final. European Commission,

Brussels, 2020. Weblink: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/eea-communication-sept2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/eea-communication-sept2020_en)

8 Council conclusions on the New European Research Area. 13567/20. Council of the European Union, Brussels,

2020. Weblink: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13567-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

9 Internationale Kennis- en Talentstrategie. Kamerbrief. Ministerie van OCW, Den Haag, 2020. Weblink:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/12/18/internationale-kennis-en-talentstrategie/internationale-kennis-en-talentstrategie.pdf>

themes and compass. Important aspects for international cooperation from a European view include mobility both virtually and where possible physically, skilling in social entrepreneurship, plurilingualism, and lifelong learning as a mindset<sup>3</sup>.

### *3.2. Our vision on the new balance between general openness of EU cooperation on R&I versus promotion and protection of the EU's strategic autonomy*

Open science and open education are essential democratic debates and processes. Aurora believes in openness, collaboration and strategic autonomy as the three essential principles needed to jointly face increasing competition and factionalism in a multipolar world. International cooperation can only be achieved in continuous dialogue. We notice that a general openness makes sense for research at lower TRL levels (1-2), while for higher TRL levels it would make sense to apply some protection policy. However, openness also applies to education, training, teaching and research mobility provided that European added value is assured. Europe should find a new balance between openness, collaboration and strategic autonomy in the face of increased competition between blocks in a new multipolar world.

*Recommendation #2.* Use universities as windows to global collaboration without being naïve on safeguarding strategic expertise, fair and sustainable development, and the strengthening of European democratic values. Active and globally engaged citizens need new and renewed skills and knowledge, if we want to achieve the UN SDGs and seriously build a better future, and universities are central to providing them.

### *3.3. Global areas and prerequisites for cooperation and instruments*

Currently, the EU international cooperation strategy shows a focus on EFTA countries, EU enlargement countries, countries covered by the European Neighbouring policy, industrialised countries and emerging economies as well as developing countries. Five aspects are important to us regarding international cooperation:

- 1) As research, innovation and education are interrelated, any restrictions and national barriers for education systems and priority assignments to education and research may hamper an effective international cooperation.
- 2) The UK HEIs are of global importance. The EU has a longstanding relationship with the UK and its HEIs regarding both R&I and education. Now the UK has left the EU, the R&I collaboration strand will be continued but the education strand is hampered as the Erasmus+ participation has been ceased by the UK.
- 3) Beyond the current and renewed partnerships between the EU and e.g. Africa and the Mediterranean region, there are areas of the world including Latin America in which the EU can play an important role to support economic and social development - i.e. developing countries as a priority in view of the social innovation focus of Aurora. Complex issues may arise related with (necessary) tightening collaborations in case of serious democratic concerns e.g. regarding academic freedom and students' rights.
- 4) On the other hand, technical innovation and digitalisation in higher education and research and the major paradigm shifts happening as a result of COVID-19 are creating new and unprecedented opportunities for international cooperation in education and research.
- 5) Aurora welcomes the different ways to stimulate and support international cooperation including EU programmes for research and innovation (Horizon Europe), education (Erasmus

esp. KA107 and KA2 schemes), youth and mobility, and international development, learning resources and partnerships<sup>10, 11</sup>.

Recommendation #3.

a) The EU needs to:

- \* continue promoting and funding mobility and cooperation within the EEA and ERA and extend this work to enable cooperation beyond the EU borders,
- \* put more instruments and funding in place to further facilitate an intense research collaboration, such as shared core research facilities and cutting-edge research collaborative projects, and
- \* facilitate sharing knowledge and experiences in line with open science and open education, to establish best practices that can be adapted as needed locally, improve and help with capacity building in research and education, and engage society. An effective way would be to open (an enlarged) Erasmus mobility fund for mobility to non-EU countries. This may be done up to a proportion on mobility per university and with an equal balance of mobility funding from the non-EU partners – applying basic Erasmus+ conditions as the Learning Agreement and the recognition obligation.

b) The technical standards that are being created within the EEA to achieve interoperability of information systems in higher education to facilitate seamless student and staff mobility, be it physical, blended or virtual mobility, should be extended globally. The EU needs to ensure that the same standards and streamlining of exchange of academic data are also applied to education and research cooperation outside Europe.

Recommendation #4. Based on the longstanding relationship between UK and EU the HEIs evolved extensive collaborations both in research, innovation activities, and education and skilling of young people and staff. By addressing the relation between EU and UK HEI systems the EU needs to find a new balance to secure the established collaborations on R&I and education.

Recommendation #5. The international cooperation activities need an open dialogue on values and motivations both within the EU and with the non-EU countries. In principle, values and norms should be aligned with the EEA and ERA. The goal must be to strengthen democracy, enliven students' rights, strengthen gender diversity and equality, and truly embrace diversity and inclusiveness. The path towards this goal is long and thorny still. Academic autonomy and freedom must be protected and the reciprocity of knowledge use and access to information and means guaranteed. Higher education institutions could play a relevant role in fostering democratic culture and practices through more interaction on education and research. As an example, the Aurora Alliance Capacity Development Support Programme<sup>12</sup> aims at bridging the gap between strong research-intensive universities in Aurora with emerging universities in Central Eastern Europe and neighbouring countries by building the network of 30 universities collaborating together on digitalisation, diversity, mobility and social entrepreneurship in order to respond to current societal challenges. The goal is achieving integration across the West-East European and reducing the higher education institutions divide.

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10 Activities coordinated by DG INTPA – international partnerships. Weblink:

[https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/organisation/dg-intpa-dg-international-partnerships\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/organisation/dg-intpa-dg-international-partnerships_en)

11 EU International Partnerships (INTPA) Academy. Weblink: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/intpa-academy/>

12 Aurora Alliance Capacity Development Support Programme. Weblink:

<https://www.upol.cz/nc/zpravy/zprava/clanek/introducing-the-associate-partners-of-the-aurora-alliance/>

*Recommendation #6.* Programmes to stimulate and support international cooperation need to be adequately funded and open to non-EU countries, be synergistic and/or complemented by their national programmes in accordance with national capacities, and in line with the national needs and expertise. The Dutch national research council “Science Diplomacy Fund”<sup>13</sup> or the EU funded project S4D4C<sup>14</sup> are examples devoted to intensify diplomatic relationships via scientific activities.

### *3.4. European Universities Alliances*

Universities have international strategic partnerships like joint projects with an impact on curricula or research, joint programmes such as joint, double or multiple degrees, or complex university alliances such as European Universities Alliances. Such partnerships are based on strategically managed multi-level cooperation within the organisation, both in teaching and in research or other activities. These partnerships are a basic prerequisite for achieving high quality in science, R&I and higher education as well as for solving urgent global problems crossing national borders. Vice versa, a focus on making the curriculum provided at home institutions for students more international can increase the quality of study programmes and equip all graduates with global competences: the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, understanding and appreciating perspectives and world views of others, engaging open and appropriately with other cultures, and acting for collective wellbeing and supporting UN SDGs<sup>15</sup>. The quality and impact of international strategic cooperation is also enhanced by the partnership of universities in international university networks.

European Universities Alliances are pilots under the European Universities Initiative for the types of future universities in Europe. These are laboratories for experiments to achieve the EEA and contribute to the ERA objectives. Higher education institutions optimally serve their constituencies in education, research, innovation and service to society. These constituencies are amalgams at local, regional, national, European and global level. The nature of the collaboration varies among countries, regions and (types of) institutions. This diversity is part of the richness of European diversity and contributes to resilience, agility and adaptability to changing conditions. Hence, such alliances will serve as linking pin between research, innovation, all levels of education and skilling, and the wider society. These alliances can act as champions for a multilateral approach to foster societal innovations and solutions to global challenges, creating in the process new global alliances, coalitions and partnerships.

*Recommendation #7.* The current and potential future European University Alliances can serve this linking pin and champion function only if EU funding programmes allow for this. Aurora would also welcome endured funding beyond the pilot period by regional or national governments and the European Commission. The potential success for funding programmes has already been provided e.g. in the Erasmus+ Impact Study<sup>16</sup> demonstrating that a third of Erasmus+ funded projects between groups of higher education institutions helped creating spin-offs and start-ups.

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13 NWO Science Diplomacy Fund. Weblink: <https://www.nwo.nl/onderzoeksprogrammas/science-diplomacy-fund-sdf>

14 Using Science for/in Diplomacy for addressing global Challenges (S4D4C). Weblink: <https://www.s4d4c.eu/>

15 PISA 2018 Global Competence. OESO 2018. Weblink: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2018-global-competence.htm>

16 Erasmus+ Impact Study – factsheet. DG EAC, Brussels, 2019. Weblink:

[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/erasmus\\_plus\\_factsheet\\_impact\\_study\\_result\\_2019\\_version\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/erasmus_plus_factsheet_impact_study_result_2019_version_final.pdf)

*Recommendation #8.* To be able to address the SDGs at global level Aurora emphasizes the need for possibilities to have non-European universities as external members of or even beneficiaries in the alliances.

#### 4. Summary

Aurora agrees with revision of the current 2012 international cooperation strategy of the EU. We recommend the EC:

- \* to include all the aspects mentioned in their ERA and EEA communications (published in 2020) as basic principles for internal EU cooperation and cooperation with non-EU countries;
- \* to continue the existing ways for stimulating and supporting international collaborations;
- \* to provide a global approach integrating research, innovation, and education and addressing a lifelong learning mindset hence connecting all educational levels to achieve both the EU goals and the UN SDGs;
- \* to focus on the UN SDGs as a compass for international cooperation activities in R&I and education;
- \* to focus on a renewed balance in relationships on R&I and education between EU and the UK to foster the longstanding collaboration and mutual exchange and transfer of knowledge, skills and results;
- \* to foster the linking pin role that the European Universities Alliances provide and will be able to continue to provide, and to install sustained funding and support by both the EC and national governments; and
- \* to provide the possibility for inclusion of non-EU higher education institutions as beneficiary partners which will also contribute to the global approach and contribution to achieving the UN SDGs.

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