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THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH AREA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Background

The project MED HUB seeks to contribute to creating the Euro-Mediterranean region a region of peace, sustainable development and intercultural understanding.

The project's premise is that a thorough understanding of the region requires long-term tools and substantial effort. The higher education sector can play a considerable role in these endeavours by nurturing academics, who can foster a meaningful debate with civil society actors and the students/youth/future leaders, and ultimately inform policy-makers. An engaged understanding is ultimately useful to providing policy input and for an effective engagement among peoples.

These recommendations have been developed by the MED HUB project team, based on discussions at a series of events in the framework of the project.

2. Purpose

The purpose of these recommendations is to provide policy-makers, mostly at national and European levels, some concrete advice on contributing to the acceleration of the Euro-Mediterranean region higher education and research space.

3. General recommendations

- Promote and support joint programmes among the universities, including from South Mediterranean.
- Promote and support activities and projects that demonstrate a common identity of the Euro-Mediterranean (cross-border cultural routes, fortress trails and similar ideas), because they build a shared identity among the places and peoples, and also support local economies through cultural tourism.
- Promote the use of multiple languages in the region, not only English.
- Gather and address the concerns, fears and suggestions of students and younger generations.
- Foster cooperation among people from throughout the region in addressing technical and cultural issues.

4. Recommendations from selected issue-areas

4.1. *Migrants and migration studies*

- Shift to a positive human capital approach of migration. Emphasize that the EU can benefit from young people and that migrants from Euro-Mediterranean

countries are important contribution and human capital (knowledge, skills, anti-gentrification).

- Develop the concept of social responsibility of universities that defines the university as the seat of knowledge, wisdom and promoter of future social values, which can make a difference and has a power to construct and reconstruct social ideas, public opinion and on a long-term social actions and policies, promote equality, non-discrimination, sustainability, social justice etc.
- Instead of discussing only surveillance, security and human rights, adopt a more positive and holistic approach and perception of migrants as assets for further social and economic growth of European Union.
- Abide by and promote the rule of law, including the human rights law.
- Take interest in the implementation of legislation, including the practical difficulties, such as language issues.
- Support organized meetings with migrant children and presentation of their experiences to foster the desired skills and attitudes of university staff working with migrant students, such as intercultural dialogue, cohabitation, discrimination, culturalism etc.

4.2. *Creative and active citizenship education*

- Take concrete steps to further open up the space for youth in political sphere.
- Put measures in place for intercultural dialogue to come back to a more grassroots level and have it based on personal relations, rather than insitutionalised.
- There is the right to access culture; take steps to ensure it.
- Continue supporting Erasmus+ and similar public programmes for the Mediterranean, as they represent a good basis for circular mobility in the region.
- Ensure support for creative industries in ways that reflect the ideas of the youth.
- Enhance sustainable funding for creative projects and ideas, including in their production stage and for a longer period.
- Involve the youth in political participation, via their communication channels, i.e. social media and online.
- Promote diversity of societies as an asset, not as a burden.

4.3. *Plural and tolerant societies*

- Ensure more active roles for women and youth in the interfaith dialogue, through for example, portrayals of the Arab and/or Muslim women that have changed the intersubjective and interreligious connections with their social or

political action, or a special book series in which women's works in the sphere of interfaith dialogue would be published.

- Promote translation as a tool of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, including of selected translations from Arabic media into English about subjects that have relevance about the role of religion and interfaith dialogue in the Arab world and in societies across the EuroMed region. Translation raises the objectivity of media and communicates the policies and events more widely to the non-Arabic speaking world.
- Establish a platform to serve as a Euro-Mediterranean public space where the public is able to understand and communicate common issues with each other.
- Ensure means for “active participation” of young people – let their voice be heard through social media with posts and videos, sending a message about overcoming interreligious differences based on common values.
- Invest in understanding the actual attitudes of the population on their understanding and perceptions of religion, beyond superficial statements on being religious or not. One method to achieve this would be to devote the Eurobarometer to study/assess the status of the interfaith dialogue with more in-dept questions.
- Harness modern technology for the promotion of democratic, tolerant values. There are instances of blockchain technology being used in an emancipatory way that promotes human rights for all.
- Promote the (thin) values that are shared across the region, irrespective of the religion, especially human dignity.
- Practice ecumenical dialogue alongside the interreligious dialogue.
- Invite businesses to get involved in the interreligious dialogue and make it be part of social responsibility, where this is appropriate.

4.4. *Healthy and active lifestyles*

- Empower people to take an active role in managing their health, increase their physical activity, and support innovation and new services that have an impact on health and reduce inequalities in health.
- Ensure national implementation plans for promoting healthy citizens and the healthy lifestyle paradigm, and the responsibilities of national institution and policy
- Adopt guidelines for the national education system, local communities and other stakeholders for promoting and practicing social responsibility in the areas of: promoting healthy lifestyle and its characteristics (nutrition, physical activity/exercise and preventing risk for health habits).
- Promote, with much more rigour, the importance of physical activity for several health outcomes.
- Make transparent that sedentary lifestyle and work are understood as an important health care factor, and promote ways of its reduction by ensuring

that one can continue contributing to a world that favours physical inactivity and sedentarism. Further, explore ways for less sedentarism without giving up advantages of technology use, paying attention especially for youth population.

- Replicate good practices of promotion of healthy lifestyle through kindergartens (with positive impact on the entire family) and of national campaigns for promotion of healthy food. Promote active commuting to school and workplace, and allow infrastructure to do so.
- Invest into infrastructure to ensure and promote outdoor mass physical activity (playgrounds, activity parks, open fitness, running/walking paths and bike lines etc.)

4.5. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship

- Promote the values of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship across the societal spheres. Ensure wide accessibility to them; make sure to treat them as open to the entire society (not only to some – educated – segments of it).
- Make sure that promotion of social innovation does not deter from the responsibility of policy-makers to create more favourable conditions on the structural level, such as closing the skills and gender gap, improving access to finance, improving the legislative contexts, eradicating corruption etc.
- Work structurally to integrate creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship into the curricula at various levels of teaching, in accordance with the age groups. The »train the trainers« approach is useful as teachers are the key drivers of change in students.
- Start embracing all types of innovation in the act of policy-making. This means not only invest in complicating but in simplifying things and getting rid of what is not necessary or moves away from the existing way of doing things.
- Change the discourse and indicators to put focus on the qualities of simple, efficient innovation, e.g. speak about how much investment do you get by investing 1 eur, rather than speaking about how much money you invest in absolute terms into R&D.
- The EU and Euro-Mediterranean regional policies should capture the notions of frugal innovation, social innovation and grassroots innovation as development tools/enablers.
- Increase the positive image of the MENA region as an opportunity for business and cooperation. An example of a positive image can be found in the fact that of the 100 highly innovative start-ups, 12% come from the MENA region.
- Focus specifically on civil service to endorse a mindset of creativity and innovation. Have the civil service not only promote these qualities, but be role models, inspiring others.