



“Topics in the Area of Bi-regional Academic Cooperation”

Álvaro Maglia

Executive Secretary of the Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group (AUGM)

Joint Executive Secretary of the Governing Body of the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Area (ENLACES)

Bi-regional academic cooperation in higher education, between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) goes back a long way, and it acquired particular significance at bi-regional political level at the II CELAC-EU Summit of Heads of State and Government (2015), where the Action Plan established the need for dialogue and cooperation between bi-regional academic actors in the Common Area of Higher Education.

There are many and varied topics in the area of bi-regional academic cooperation in higher education and its close links with science, technology and innovation. These topics cannot be removed from their context of other aspects such as agendas, public policies, real areas of production in the academic field, or the policy of internationalising cooperation in the bi-regional area, among other things; it is therefore necessary to link them together.

On the initiative of the President of the EU-LAC Foundation, Leonel Fernández, and with its creation facilitated by this organisation, the document: *“Matrix of objectives, strategies and instruments for constructing the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education”*, was produced between 2017 and 2019 with diverse participation and a high level of consensus from various relevant academic actors, bi-regional, regional and sub-regional.

By analysing the content of the *Matrix* we can make progress in some topics of bi-regional academic cooperation which I will

deal with briefly. The topics in the academic area, but also hypotheses, contexts and instruments (which must all point to its development), are expressed in six general objectives, strategic lines of action and associated activities. This is complemented by information about current initiatives and activities that will make it possible to improve the synergies between the *Matrix* and actual experiences currently underway.

The *Matrix*, at the same time as describing very particular academic fields in bi-regional cooperation, introduces aspects of the context that are necessary to make real progress in the plan to construct the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education.

Referring to the systems, organisations and institutions of higher education in the EU and LAC, it highlights the importance of fluid dialogue and of greater and better connections, both in what is done thematically and with the actors in higher education; such as more and better participation from the organisations and institutions of higher education in the EU and LAC, in order to achieve greater impact in the definition, implementation and evaluation of public policies in matters of the bi-regional agenda. Mutual knowledge and trust, as well as minimising and overcoming asymmetries between the bi-regional actors concerned, is of the greatest importance.

One area of bi-regional cooperation - no doubt strategic - refers to cooperation in accreditation and quality assurance processes and their desired consequences, such as the mutual



recognition of qualifications and programmes, the mobility of academics and administrators, joint supervisions, joint European-Latin American qualifications, the creation of partnerships and work between bi-regional networks of higher education.

Significant attention was given to the academic topic of developments in innovation and in the internationalisation of teaching and learning, including the use of ICT and new technologies, as well as to teacher education for this strategy and cooperation to create bi-regional virtual campuses. In addition, it focussed on the generation of joint programmes and qualifications, based on innovating and internationalising the curriculum in areas of common interest.

Greater and better interaction between the systems of higher education and those of research and innovation and their respective bi-regional agendas generates various topics in the area of bi-regional academic cooperation; among these we could highlight the interaction of higher education and science, technology and innovation, coordination and linkage to generate capacity for innovation and training for research, the shared generation of scientific knowledge, the transfer of technology and innovation between institutions of higher education and of science, technology and innovation and the promotion of open science which, among other things, will reduce asymmetries in the cycle of scientific production and linkage with social actors. These topics provide significant areas for such cooperation.

It is worth noting that, in formulating the *Matrix*, the appeal to the organisations and institutions of higher education in the EU and LAC to “take ownership” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 of the United Nations, and contribute to a bi-regional agenda, as a topic in the area of bi-regional academic cooperation, met with an immediate consensus. We can already see that bi-regional cooperation in a global agenda of such significance creates a hub of cooperative work of great strength, generates countless possibilities for joint actions that impact the transfer of knowledge between the systems of higher education, science, technology and innovation and the societies to which they belong, with the potential for obtaining finance for joint activities.

To sum up, the *Matrix* (while not providing an exhaustive ex-

amination of all possible topics) looks at those themes that met with the consensus of the participants in its construction, providing a starting point to use this instrument to generate synergies and implement actions, the same actions that will enable progress in constructing the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education.