

Statement on twinning partnership between Ukrainian and European universities

The European aspirations of Ukrainian society and authorities have been well known and repeatedly expressed in the recent past, but the aggression of the Russian Federation and the more than three-month-long war in defense of independence have contributed to rethinking the previous actions and establishing new priorities. This is happening at a time when Higher education institutions (HEIs) in eastern Ukraine are almost completely destroyed, when many university buildings in Kyiv and Kharkiv and other cities of central Ukraine are ruined, and when HEIs in western Ukraine are still trying to function.

In this situation, the education and scientific world of the European Union, and especially the European Universities alliances, have expressed their full solidarity and are now willing to take further concrete actions to help Ukrainian HEIs, their students and staff members. Over the last years, these European Universities have been very successful in building integration mechanisms at a European level, both in the field of educational offerings and joint research, and management of complex consortia. Along with many other HEIs and networks, they are acting as key players of the European Education Area (EEA) in the making, in synergy with the European Higher Education Area.

Extraordinary circumstances force us to take unconventional measures, and only with our European joint efforts we will succeed. We welcome the adaptations in the actions under the Erasmus+ programme to allow for most flexibility to support students and staff from Ukrainian HEIs, as well as for cooperation activities with them. Ukrainian universities are also aware of the importance of this assistance, as they struggle every day with the difficulties of war and cannot fully benefit from the already available forms of aid, often also lacking sufficient administrative background and experience in applying for grants. We believe more action is needed to maximize the impact and answer those needs.

To speed up the process of reconstruction and synchronization of higher education functioning standards in Ukraine and the EU, we propose a simple but efficient procedure, namely the twinning between a Ukrainian HEI (or a group of Ukrainian HEIs) and an alliance of European Universities that can be the coordinator of and catalyst for such partnerships. Other European HEIs and networks can participate equally in this kind of partnership. The goal of such a twinning should be to give access to Ukrainian HEIs to the educational and research joint resources of the alliances or networks, and develop new multilateral cooperation and joint programmes. Identification of needs and opportunities shall be bottom-up and submitted to the European commission for evaluation in the frame of a call supporting the establishment of such twinning partnerships.

We are calling for Member States, Vice President Margaritis Schinas and Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, in their role in supporting academic freedom, mobility, joint educational programmes and cooperation in research, as well as Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, responsible for strengthening relations with the EU's neighbouring countries, to support this mobilisation from the European higher education sector of establishing these twinning partnerships. We strongly believe they can serve as a leverage for providing the indispensable assistance Ukrainian HEIs need and for building future peace and prosperity in Europe.

Signatories (to be added): **Alliances of European universities, Ukrainian Union of Rectors**