



**7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)**  
**Students' Forum: 11–15 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019**  
**Bucharest, Romania**

**Higher Education Taking Action towards Sustainable Development Goals:  
 Perspectives from Asia and Europe**

**ARC7 Rectors' Conference**  
**Policy Recommendations for the**

**7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)**  
 15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. The SDGs are universal, transformative and rights-based, and explicitly refer to higher education and research.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference, higher education institution leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three core areas of institutional activity: 1) institutional governance; 2) societal impact; and 3) international partnerships.

The Conference resulted in **Commitments** by higher education institutions (HEIs) from both regions, and also proposed **Policy Recommendations** to feed into the deliberations and outcomes of the 7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM ME7).

#### **Commitments by Higher Education Institutions**

Higher education institutions contribute to building the environmental, economic, social, cultural and intellectual conditions required for a sustainable future for all through their three institutional missions (education, research and community engagement). Higher education institutions have the capacity to engage with the different SDGs through a whole institution approach, i.e. through actions in the areas of teaching, research, governance, campus resource management and through the values and ethics lived in the academic community and shared with society at large. They are committed to stepping up their actions and allocate the necessary resources.

#### **Building and sharing capacity to contribute to global transformation**

Higher education inter- and multidisciplinary curriculum, research, knowledge development and dissemination are key to addressing the Goals. Higher education institutions engage in local and international partnerships, involving other education and research organisations, governments, NGOs,

businesses and other society actors. These partnerships should be (re)considered in the context of the SDGs, in their ability to transcend disciplinary, political, social and cultural boundaries, and as a contribution to peace, inclusion and solidarity.

### **Providing lifelong learning for a global community**

Higher education contributes through research and education to sustainable societies in the global context of demographic changes, technological developments and evolving societal demands. Higher education institutions from both regions therefore pledge to provide lifelong learning opportunities for the benefit of the global community. Higher education institutions are committed to equip learners from all socio-economic and educational backgrounds with the necessary knowledge and skills to learn and adapt to new tasks and situations.

### **Embracing internationalisation as part of a global commitment towards sustainable development**

Universities from Asia and Europe pledge to envision internationalisation as part of a more global commitment towards sustainable collaborations, translated into connected institutional strategies with globally sustainable and equitable objectives. The Agenda 2030 provides a key opportunity to reassess the goals, purposes and means of higher education internationalisation, and to address standing issues, such as imbalances in research capacity and mobility exchanges. Achieving the SDGs requires better and more ethical cooperation in research and education, in terms of access, equal opportunities, and geographic balance. A better engagement with the SDGs is necessary in all university endeavours. This should be reflected in research projects and partnerships, curricula reform, informal learning opportunities, as well as international, purpose driven student and staff exchange and inter-university collaboration.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Universities from Asia and Europe recommend the ASEM Education Ministers to

#### **1. Orient the ASEM Education Process towards the Agenda 2030**

Ministers are invited to include the SDGs into the goals, priorities and activities of the ASEM Education Process (AEP). This would enable the Process to play an active role towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030, and also stimulate each individual ASEM Partner country to make the Agenda 2030 part of national education and research strategy.

#### **2. Support higher education institutions to engage with the Agenda 2030**

ASEM governments should encourage and support higher education institutions to address SDGs in strategy and actions for education, research and community engagement. Governments should recognise these initiatives, as part of the national contribution to the Agenda 2030. They should ensure that rules and regulations, including funding rules, and national quality assurance and research assessment frameworks support the development of inter- and multidisciplinary research, use of innovative teaching approaches and development of transformative curricula, and the engagement in local and international cooperation. Governments have to ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy, academic freedom and appropriate accountability as key conditions for the exchange of knowledge and development of competences that our societies require to reach the SDGs.

#### **3. Incentivize and support education and research collaboration among universities and with other societal actors, at national and international levels**

ASEM governments should create a positive environment for collaboration, among higher education institutions and with other parts of society, to advance education, knowledge, and innovation, and in line

with the higher education third mission. Governments should not only valorise collaboration with enterprises, NGOs, local communities or national authorities, but also community engagement, community-based learning and citizen science.

#### **4. Develop research and knowledge-based policy agendas and informed decision-making in democratic societies**

ASEM governments should develop policy agendas informed by internationally reviewed and recognised inter- and multidisciplinary research, and close collaboration with universities and other civil society actors, considering multi-stakeholder perspectives, economic, environmental and social aspects, and the prospective impacts for national, local and global society. This would also be a means to enhance and strengthen democracy, distinguish national interests from nationalistic ones, and counter populism, fake news, alternative truth and conspiracy theories, that seek to undermine and discredit both, international initiatives, such as the Agenda 2030, and research and education.

#### **5. Acknowledge and support the role of higher education in contributing to equity, inclusion and lifelong learning**

ASEM governments should develop policies and strategies for social inclusion and lifelong learning, encompassing all education sectors and forms of learning, and all stakeholders, including higher education and research. They should encourage and recognise the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, through research, education and outreach to society. There is ample evidence that diversity enhances the quality and relevance of research and education. The experience of inclusion and equity as a shared value in education and research, and the ability and opportunities for lifelong learning will also prepare future graduates to contribute to peace and sustainable development, as part of the work force and through active citizenship.

#### **6. Support higher education internationalisation in line with the goals of the Agenda 2030**

The 2030 Agenda provides an appropriate framework to rethink internationalisation as a part of a fair and equitable approach to education. ASEM Governments should review their national strategies for internationalisation, including legislative frameworks, enabling institutions to pursue fair and/or equitable and ethical internationalisation that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. This would require the set-up of appropriate funding schemes, including truly transnational funding schemes. It also requires incentives for more ethical internationalisation, in terms of equal opportunities, learning gains and geographic balance, and incentives for professional development. Likewise, fair and adequate recognition mechanisms of diplomas, period of studies abroad and prior learning need to be established or strengthened.

## Conclusive words

The leaders of higher education institutions in Asia and Europe and ARC7 participants express their hope and expectation that the above commitments and policy recommendations will enable ASEM governments, institutions and all education stakeholders under the ASEM Education Process to contribute jointly and proactively to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Using the framework of the SDGs provides an opportunity to relate national priorities and interests to the wider context of a global environment and a global realm of knowledge and research. It enables Asian and European governments and higher education institutions to develop stronger education and research partnerships to generate a better future for all.

## Background:

The 7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference was hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), in Bucharest, Romania, on 12-14 May 2019. It brought together over 150 leaders of higher education institutions, experts, government officials and 51 student leaders from 51 Asian and European ASEM partner countries to discuss how can higher education take action towards the sustainable development goals.

The policy recommendations were proposed and reviewed by the ARC7 organising partners – European University Association (EUA), International Association of Universities (IAU), ASEAN University Network (AUN) – discussed and finalised by the ARC7 Rectors' Conference participants.

Co-organised by



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