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Proceedings of the Colloquium “Strengthening Global Policy Dialogue on Higher Education” / “Fortalecer el Diálogo de Política Global sobre la Educación Superior”

A Colloquium between a number of South American countries and the EHEA’s Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogues’s Americas Subgroup was held on 5 December 2022 at 13.00 CET / 9:00 am Uruguay time.

The colloquium was hosted by the pro tempore president of MERCOSUR (Uruguay) on Zoom.

English/Spanish translation was made available to participants.

Participants

Opening speakers

- Carlos Romero Rostagno, host, Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay.
- Victoria Galán-Muros, Chief of Research and Analysis, UNESCO IESALC.
- Félix García Lausín, coordinator of the Ibero-American Knowledge Space, Ibero-American General Secretariat.

MERCOSUR/Latin American Countries (LAC)

- Argentina: Oscar Alpa, Secretary for University Policies, Ministry of Education.
- Bolivia: José Luis Gutiérrez, Vice-Minister of Higher Education and Professional Formation.
- Chile: Thomas Griggs, Chief of Division of Universities, Ministry of Education.
- Colombia: Ricardo Moreno, Adviser to the Office of the Vice Minister for Higher Education and Head in Charge of the Office of International Affairs
- Ecuador: Cecilia Santana, Under Secretary, Higher Education Institutions.
- Paraguay: Ariel Fernando Bado, Director General, Universities, Institutes of Higher Education and Higher Technical Institutes.
- Uruguay: Gonzalo Baroni, National Director of Education.
- Venezuela: Domingo Medina, Ministry of Higher Education.

EHEA

- Ann Katherine Isaacs, Co-Chair, Coordination Group in Global Policy Dialogue (CG GPD) and Co-Chair, Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG), Italy.



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- Melanie Rosenbaum, Head, International Center for Recognition (ICR), Dicastery for Culture and Education, Holy See.
- Michael Roither, Vice Rector for International Affairs, Professor for Digital Media and Communication, University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, Austria.
- Orla Lynch, Strategic Policy Adviser, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Irish Ministry of Education, Ireland.
- Jon Vercellono, ENIC-NARIC, Further and Higher Education Authority, Malta.
- Bruno Castro Benito, Policy Officer for Latin and North America, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission.
- Andreas Snildal, UNESCO, Senior Programme Officer, Higher Education, Secretary to the Global Recognition Convention.

Proceedings

PART 1

A 2.5 hours open recorded session for the invited participants simultaneously broadcast on YouTube.

This was composed of presentations by the EHEA participants and MERCOSUR member and affiliated countries.

Introductory speeches

The meeting was opened by Carlos Romero Rostagno, host and organizer on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay. Opening remarks set the stage, explaining how the idea of the Colloquium emerged, and what the intentions of the CG were. The text of his remarks (Annexes 4a and 4b) had been shared with the Subgroup before the meeting.

The next speaker was Victoria Galán-Muros, Chief of Research and Analysis, UNESCO IESALC, who underlined the importance of LAC cooperation, recognition conventions and particularly the right to study. She highlighted the challenges within the region for cooperation and building initiatives. An offer was made on behalf of IESALC to support the growth of LAC participation in Erasmus+ and other programmes.

Félix García Lausín, coordinator of the Ibero-American Knowledge Space, Ibero-American General Secretariat, emphasized the importance of building trust and cooperation and described the various facets of the Ibero-American cooperation.

Presentations

The opening presentation was made jointly by the Americas subgroup of the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue (CG GPD) to provide overall a coherent and focused message about the intent of



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the CG GPD and their understanding of the value of strengthened and more constant and purpose of dialogue between the EHEA and LAC (see Annex 1 for the slides).

The participating South American countries each provided a short presentation. Some key points were:

- **Colombia:** Inclusion; the importance of strengthening secondary education in order to enable broader sectors of the population to access higher education successfully; the need for public resources to accomplish the necessary tasks.
- **Ecuador:** The importance, also with respect to the effort to achieve the SDGs, of ensuring that educational careers lead to employment. Ecuador also underlined the need for gender equality.
- **Paraguay:** The education system must respond to the labor market and take into account the needs of the population. Paraguay also expressed interest in collaborating with the CG/EHEA.
- **Chile:** After the pandemic, and within the effort to recover lost time, equal access and above all retention are key. The TVET sector should be strengthened, in order to adapt better to the labor market. More resources/gender equality were also mentioned. There was a final plea for 'alianzas' and more collaboration, rather than competition and the effort to 'beat each other' among the countries.
- **Uruguay:** particular emphasis to the importance of teaching training. The hope is to not only ensure access of all social strata/groups to education and to HE, but also to reduce the time actually spent to obtain a degree, and the number of dropouts. To achieve this a strengthening of the secondary schools is important, and also the broad distribution of HEIs on the territory.
- **Venezuela:** Venezuela's world view includes free mandatory education for all. Venezuela cited the WHEC2022 conference in Barcelona, and the idea that the task of education is to promote 'critical thinking'. Mention was made of 'internal challenges', and the hope to serve all sectors of the population through 'territorial' universities.
- **Argentina:** As next president pro tempore of MERCOSUR, Argentina expressed interest in collaboration, and with hosting 'other discussion platforms'. The SDGs are something that we can only accomplish together.

The MERCOSUR lead (Carlos) and the CG GPD Co-chair made some closing remarks.

PART 2

After a break, a 'closed session' zoom meeting took the form of a free flowing dialogue between all participants on priority topics and areas of mutual interest.

The key topics discussed were mobility and diversity and inclusion.

Mobility



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The scope of the discussion extended to mobility for both staff and students. LACs described generally low levels of mobility in many countries and that often these are achieved solely through peer to peer staff connections.

There was a discussion about the cost of mobility relative to other priorities for public funding and the social and economic constraints that can make mobility difficult.

There was a discussion about the recent growth, due to COVID 19, of 'virtual' mobility with a recognition that this is more accessible and lower in cost. It was also recognized that there is richer and deeper learning and wider benefits that come from spending time in another country.

Contributors emphasized significant variability between LACs in terms of traditional flows and historically-based linkages with European countries and recent mobility initiatives with Spain and Portugal.

There was also a discussion about the use of a wider range existing networks and linkages and alternative sources of funding to enable mobility.

Some LACs emphasized their policy imperative to grow mobility within geographically large countries as well as inter-country mobility.

There was a discussion about the risks of 'brain drain' perceived to be associated with mobility, while at the same time recognizing the importance of supporting mobility for qualifications and skills to individuals travelling between LACs and the EHEA.

Diversity, inclusion and identifying common ground

EHEA representatives mentioned that, while structural reform was the first focus of the Bologna area and provided the path to creating common ground among the EHEA countries, at present work on the full implementation of the structural elements continues, but the EHEA's most important working groups are now those on the social dimension and on fundamental values.

LACs highlighted that their policy focus is on poverty and social themes, especially inclusion and the significant policy priority differences between LAC countries. There was an acknowledgement of significant diversity between EHEA countries too with a recognition that EHEA countries are at different stages of achieving the agreed reforms.

EHEA representatives described how the area has adopted an approach aimed at connecting the higher education systems of the member countries, while preserving their intrinsic diversity considering this to be a strength rather than a limit. Diversity is key in elaborating approaches to inclusivity and allows the incorporation of a wide range of perspectives in EHEA reforms.

EHEA representatives emphasized that 'harmonization' is not the intention of the EHEA, rather the Bologna Process aims to achieve transparency and comparability and that the history of the Bologna Process demonstrates that it is possible to begin with a small common ground and build out from that.



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In both regions HEI's are recognized as the initiators and leaders and the common locus for development and improvement.

LACs underlined, from various perspectives, the difficulties of focusing on overarching initiatives or reforms in the presence of budgetary constraints and the challenges of guaranteeing quality education to broad portions of the population.

The Colloquium ended with brief closing remarks by MERCOSUR and CG GPD leads and a hope to hold another such meeting during the next semester.

Draft Concluding Statement for Agreement *(the statement below reflects the EHEA perceived outcome. MERCOSUR countries and the associated countries can choose if a concluding statement is merited and if so contribute to a final text for the statement) to be agreed.*

We recognise the value of opening and maintaining dialogue between the EHEA and MERCOSUR and its member and associated countries to ensure understanding and identify the scope for mutual learning based on our respective priorities, perspectives and approaches.

It is clear that there is a common concern with social inclusion across the two regions. The current focus within the diverse EHEA region, namely on enhancing the social dimension by facilitating connectivity, recognition, forming new frameworks and strengthening existing frameworks and tools, and the policy focus across LAC, namely on lifting people out of poverty through education and expanding the inclusiveness of HE, are complementary and provide a basis for further dialogue and mutual learning. We share the conviction that higher education is a social good and a human right.

Follow up

- Preparation and sharing of a list of contacts from the Colloquium attendees and organisations mentioned in the discussion.
- Contact to be made with Argentina, as the next President pro tempore of MERCOSUR host, to establish the feasibility of another colloquium for the coming semester (first semester of 2023).
- Creating mutual learning opportunities by extending invitations to relevant EHEA events to MERCOSUR members and HEIs.
- Planning of an 'IN-GLOBAL' Americas Conference in the second half of 2023.

Improvements

To build on the experience of this first colloquium to improve practical aspects such as support resources, translation, slide presentations, clear and coherent messages and communications and enabling maximum participation.



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YouTube links

LIVE en Español YouTube – Educación MEC – COLOQUIO: "Fortalecer el Diálogo de Política Global sobre la Educación Superior" (<https://youtu.be/U2-E9qLTI34>).

LIVE in English YouTube – Ministerio de Educación y Cultura Uruguay – COLLOQUIUM: "Enhancing Global Policy Dialogue on Higher Education" (<https://youtu.be/OL-RaNKxJjk>).

Annexes

Annex 1: EHEA slide pack

Annex 2a: Final programme in ES

Annex 2b: Final programme in EN

Annex 3a: Flyer in ES

Annex 3b: Flyer in EN

Annex 4a: Carlos Romero's opening remarks in ES

Annex 4b: Carlos Romero's opening remarks in EN

Annex 5: Katherine Isaacs' draft concluding remarks for the podcast

Annex 6: Colloquium IN-GLOBAL twitter

Annex 7: Invitation to BFUG members

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