



Mission Report

Type of mission	Annual SPHERE Conference
Subject	EU and its neighbours: Higher education policy and cooperation
Location	Brussels
Date	11-12 December 2017 (10 December Advisory Committee)
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General Context

- P. Gedeon, C. Mokbel two Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs), Amer Helwani from National Erasmus+ Office and H. El Ghali (non HERE member) participated in the annual conference organised by SPHERE in Brussels, Belgium, on December 11-12, 2017 about EU and its neighbours: Higher education policy and cooperation.
- During the annual conference this year the newly formed SPHERE Advisory Committee has held its first meeting to discuss its mission and plans. C. Mokbel attended on 10 December 2017 this meeting as a representative from the Southern Europe region.
- This year the conference occurs on the middle of the Erasmus+ Programme lifetime. It forms an opportunity for dialogue about the Programme, its outcomes, the expectation and the roles of the HEREs.
- For the Lebanese HEREs, the conference occurs after the TAM organised on the topic of “Rethinking Lebanese Higher Education” where strategic discussions about the perspectives of the Lebanese Higher Education have taken place. The conference permits to understand the trends in terms of policies in Europe which helps aligning the local perspectives.

Discussions

- The roundtable session entitled “EU-Southern Med Dialogue on Higher Education and Research” started with three questions: why Erasmus+ was of interest? What has been achieved thank to the Programme? What are the expectation for the future? The Lebanese HEREs underlined the great impact of Erasmus+ on the development of local Higher Education and the need for programmes such as Erasmus+ to keep the gaps within a limited range.

- It was also interesting to perceive the expectations of colleagues from different countries regarding policies and the evolution of the programmes.
- It was interesting to attend to the presentations on the outcomes of the meeting of the presidents of European States. The impact of the digital era on higher education and lifelong learning seem to be shaping the future.

My contribution

- The HEREs provided their inputs on different points in the various sessions.
- C. Mokbel has provided a short presentation on student engagement and policies.
- C. Mokbel participated to the Advisory Committee
- C. Mokbel has been interviewed by EUA on the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme locally

Lessons learned

- The large evolution of digital technologies is shaping the development in higher education
- Policies shall continue to support lifelong learning, quality and recognition
- The role of the HEREs is to be enhanced in the coming years

Ideas for exploitation

- The trends for the future are in line with what has been discussed in the local TAM on “Rethinking Higher Education”. Very little adjustments are needed.
- The need to have a system for quality assurance is still pressing.
- Reinforce the role of the HEREs in the different activities related to Erasmus+.
- Reflect upon the HEREs role and report back to the Advisory Committee.