

# "Where are we with the 'Stairway to Excellence'? The Role of European Universities".

Brussels, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016

"Modernising European Higher Education. Do recent EU Programmes really have a Regional and Local Dimension?"

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank you for the invitation.

As Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"

This conference has a very timely topic, so I am glad to be here as a speaker.

I will focus on the following issues in my speech:

- Highlights of the European Higher Education in the world CoR opinion I was the rapporteur for, and other relevant CoR opinions
- Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes on local and regional level
- Case study: Sapientia regional university located in Harghita County
- Policy recommendations for the future

The CoR has put a **serious focus** on debating the essentials and future of education. Please let me first give an overview of how we, as representatives of regional and local authorities, see the regional embedding of higher education institutions.

In the opinion on **Rethinking education**, adopted by the Committee, we formulated, that using local knowledge and democratic accountability improves the governance mechanisms for partnerships between university, business and local government. This will enable local prioritisation and accountability linked directly to the principle of subsidiarity;

The opinion on "**Modernisation of Higher Education**", which was adopted in **2011, emphasises, that in relation to the EC's U-multirank system**, It seems self-evident that the strength of regional roots and involvement in the local environment is one of the dimensions on which higher education institutions should be classified and ranked;

We also urged **to consider regional differences** in the process of european cooperation in the field of education, especially in defining objectives of european funding instruments.

As follows, I would like to highlight some key aspects the **European Higher Education in the world CoR opinion** I was the rapporteur for

The opinion summarized the possibilities for internationalisation of regional higher education institutions, making them more competitive in the global market.

We made clear that regional partnerships and connections of any education institution are of key importance – that refers to higher education and adult learning institutions as well.

We emphasized that Member States should develop programmes and support mechanism, which could be national or targeted at regions in special situations to assist higher educational institutions at local and regional level in implementing their **internationalisation strategies**;

Besides all these, we called on the Commission and the Member States to take all the requisite steps to ensure that implementing internationalisation strategies **boosts the potential of regions lagging behind**;

We also emphasized the importance of the bidirectional nature of mobility, given that mobility must, in line with the principle of inclusive development, **be consistent with the interests of both regions of origin and host regions;**

We stressed the importance of language skills in all efforts to internationalise higher education and underlined the role of local and regional authorities as facilitators in the acquisition of such skills

we emphasised that in a **multilingual and multi-ethnic Europe**, higher education institutions offering educational opportunities in more than one language, including minority languages, can play a very significant role;

**The next part of my speech will focus on regional and local dimensions of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes**

**As we all know, the Erasmus+ programme** aims at promoting **equity and inclusion** by facilitating the access to learners with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers, at taking part in transnational projects.

The obstacles or difficulties these persons may face could be of more category, among them included also the **geographical obstacles**.

- Which mean people from remote or rural areas; people living in small islands or peripheral regions; people from urban problem zones; people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities)
- In the field of youth, an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy has been designed as a common framework to support the participation and inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+.

**Horizon 2020** is the biggest EU research and innovation programme ever.

- As research and innovation are crucial to economic prosperity so measures are needed to ensure that the innovation performances of all Member States and their regions converge and improve.

- The programme objective of spreading excellence and widening participation specific measures include:
- a Policy Support Facility to help improve national and regional research and innovation policies

**Let me present you the regional case study of Sapientia regional university located in Harghita County**

The Transylvanian Hungarian university, named Sapientia was established in 2001 as an expression of decades long aspirations of the Hungarian community in Romania

As a private institution with tuition in Hungarian language in Romania, meant to respond the educational needs of the Hungarian community, to ensure a favorable environment for the development of scientific research and scientific collaboration inter-ethnic effective.

The results and cooperation relations established in science teaching institution wishes to contribute its resources to align higher education in Romania to the European standards.

Sapientia University, with campuses also in Harghita county is a pillar of development of the region on the educational plan.

Although according to the law functions as a private university, basically it functions as state one, that gives social grants, tax-free places etc.

As Sapientia University is fully funded by the Hungarian Government, with a budget, of 7 million euros annually, but this sum unfortunately is not enough.

And even though it is an important educational institution in the region, the Romanian Government does not accord any financial aid.

The case study is an eloquent example of how regional embedding is not the only criteria an education institution should fulfill and it is certainly not the only

compulsory need for a proper functioning: it should have the necessary national background integration and, as a must, coherent cooperation with business and civil environment.

**In the concluding part, let me list some policy recommendations formulated by the Committee of Regions**

The Committee of the Regions has urged Member States to step up efforts and promote the **learning mobility** of all young people so that formal and non-formal learning can be available under equal conditions, regardless of where they live.

We actually believe that a substantial proportion of the resources dedicated to the youth employment initiative should be **allocated to local and regional authorities**, to increase their ability to implement initiatives supporting youth employment in the way that is most appropriate to local conditions.

CoR stands up for including among the U-Multirank criteria the **regional embedding level** of Higher education institutions.

Also, regions lagging behind from economic point of view should be assured the proper financing mechanisms to be able to create the proper environment for a competitive educational frame.