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Being European: The need for higher education leadership

A joint statement on social sciences in a time of crisis, from the Presidents of the partner institutions of CIVICA - The European University of Social Sciences

The coronavirus crisis has changed our way of life and shaken the social, political and economic foundations of our societies.

As leaders of the prominent European higher education institutions making up *CIVICA - The European University of Social Sciences*, we know that the social sciences will play a vital role in understanding current and future challenges, and in providing the ideas and expertise that will help the world overcome them. We hereby commit to clear actions that ensure we fulfil that role and set out how policymakers across Europe can help support this crucial endeavour.

The global nature of the crisis means international cooperation in higher education and research is more important than ever. This is certainly the case in Europe, which faces profound challenges to our joint social, political, economic, health care and environmental systems. The urgent need to jointly face these challenges requires well-organised and effective cooperation and mobilisation of both resources and knowledge across the continent. This must incorporate new and deeper methods of collaboration between the medical, natural and social sciences.

The world of higher education itself is changing quickly and universities are actively amending their mission and responsibilities in light of this new reality. Core elements of the university experience, such as welcoming international students to our campuses, sending students on exchanges, hosting visiting researchers, and meeting colleagues at conferences, are no longer possible and will remain difficult indefinitely. We need to adapt our ways of working, while always being clear that the best environment for learning and research is one in which ideas can travel freely and students, teachers and researchers from across the world can interact directly.

As a European University, it is our objective to provide and vigorously promote clear, social sciences-based responses to the crisis. **We are calling on policymakers across the continent to support us in this endeavour and to work with higher education institutions to ensure that education and research continue to flow across borders inside the European Union and remain open for multilateral interactions with the rest of the world.**

CIVICA partners agree on the following immediate action as part of their cooperation:

- We will **accelerate the development of a digital learning infrastructure**. This will better connect students, faculty and researchers, primarily but not exclusively across Europe, throughout the pandemic and beyond. It will contribute to a more sustainable and interactive system of higher education and research. The CIVICA trans-European campus will be our main base for these developments and it is already in action.
- We will foster **student exchanges** between our institutions, including virtual exchanges, even while physical travel cannot resume, focusing on hybrid and blended-learning experiences as part of our joint European campus. We will promote similar opportunities with other European and international partners across the world.
- We will **reach out to the rest of the world**, recruiting talented international students, faculty and researchers to strengthen Europe's position as a global hub of innovative social science research.
- We will share with policymakers and the public at large **the outcomes of our research activities** in the social sciences, to support effective responses to the crisis and to provide significant societal benefit.

To be successful in these endeavours, we need support from our policymakers. We call upon all European and national political leaders to:

- **Recognise and support European study and exchange programmes** that may have to temporarily take place fully or mainly online. Blocking student mobility—a feature that has contributed to building a sense of European belonging—would be devastating. European physical exchange and mobility must be preserved into the future.
- **Make the reopening of our borders one of their highest priorities** as soon as the necessary health and safety conditions can be ensured. Our common European research base must be preserved, especially as a transnational response is needed to meet a transnational crisis.
- Support us in remaining open and accessible to the rest of the world, by **offering flexible visa and immigration regimes to international students and researchers**, adapted to the current situation, and by ensuring that Europe remains one of the most attractive destinations for higher education and research in the world.

Although nobody knows when the pandemic will end, we are committed to facing the crisis and its aftermath together, as partners in the CIVICA network. We will do what is necessary to keep our student and research communities closely connected in these challenging times. As a university alliance specialising in the social sciences, we believe in our responsibility and capacity to provide answers to the crisis. We believe in our common vision as a European University and in the strengthening of a European space of higher education and research.

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