

Recommendations to the European Commission

Following the conference *Bridging Continents: Higher Education as a Tool for EU–Southern Mediterranean Cooperation*, jointly organised by the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) and the Euromed University of Fes (UEMF) on 11 December 2025 in the European Parliament, in cooperation with the Brussels-based Slovenian Business & Research Association (SBRA) and supported by the Union for the Mediterranean, the following recommendations reflect a shared vision for strengthening Euro–Mediterranean cooperation and dialogue.

A core driver of all actions should be **mutual trust across Euro-Mediterranean Space**, built through equality, shared responsibility and long-term commitment.

1. Anchor South–North University Alliances as Pillars of the New Pact for Mediterranean

South–North university alliances are essential for a balanced, resilient, and inclusive Euro–Mediterranean higher education area. Existing Euro-Mediterranean universities and networks (EMUNI and UEMF) are well positioned to support and scale these alliances. As recognized higher education institutions with extensive membership across both shores of the Mediterranean, they can play a key role in implementing the Mediterranean Pact.

The European Commission is therefore invited to embed South–North university alliances as a structural component of the Pact’s implementation, moving beyond fragmented, project-based cooperation towards long-term, holistic and scalable frameworks. **A South–North university alliance led by the UEMF and EMUNI must be established and provided with all the necessary resources for its operation.** To this end, it is proposed first that the EU establish **a long-term institutional partnership between EMUNI, UEMF and the European Union.**

Strengthening these two leading universities is essential to creating an effective and robust link on both sides of the Mediterranean. This could take the form of a **Multiannual Framework Agreement (MFA)** for the period **2025–2032**. A long-term framework provides stability, predictability, and strategic depth — beyond project cycles. And second, the European Commission can **formally entrust EMUNI and UEMF with the implementation of specific Pact-related tasks**, in line with Articles 62 and 63 of the EU Financial Regulation (Regulation 2018/1046), to enable them to:

- coordinate South–North universities
- manage regional mobility platforms
- launch pilot R&I programmes tailored to Mediterranean priorities

To ensure equitable cooperation and build lasting trust, the South–North alliance led by UEMF and EMUNI should be supported by the secretariat that could be provided by the

Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in Barcelona, guaranteeing equal participation and contribution from institutions in both the South and the North. The active involvement of students should be mainstreamed, recognizing them as key actors in co-creation, mobility, and innovation processes.

2. Ensure Equitable and Coherent Funding for Academic Mobility and Joint Degrees

To advance the objectives of the New Pact for the Mediterranean, it is proposed a strategic refinement of current mobility frameworks and support for development of Joint degrees and Joint laboratories on both sides of the Mediterranean. These measures aim to transform regional exchange into a driver of sustainable development, mutual trust, and equitable partnership.

Mobility schemes must be fundamentally redesigned to **promote "brain circulation"** rather than brain drain. We advocate for the implementation of structured incentives that encourage the return of talent to their home institutions, facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration, and support long-term regional engagement. To operationalize this, **visa facilitation processes** should be streamlined for students, researchers, and academic staff participating in trusted Euro-Mediterranean partnerships. Ensuring smoother circular and repeat mobility is essential to fostering the spirit of mutual trust that underpins shared regional goals.

The European Commission and national agencies are urged to expand financial support for academic mobility within Mediterranean. A strategic adjustment of internal budget allocations is recommended, specifically **increasing the annual budget for KA171** designated for this region and also allows member countries in the southern Mediterranean to initiate Erasmus+ agreements with universities in the North.

3. Enable Inclusive, Future-Oriented South–North Research Cooperation and Innovation

Ensuring equitable access to funding and investment is essential to enable effective Euro–Mediterranean cooperation. The European Commission is encouraged to strengthen the participation of Southern Mediterranean institutions in Horizon Europe, PRIMA, Erasmus+ and related instruments through simplified participation rules, targeted capacity-building measures and dedicated calls or envelopes where appropriate. Greater coherence and complementarity across EU programmes, combined with incentives for public–private investment, will help overcome structural barriers and allow Euro–Mediterranean universities to operate at scale and deliver long-term impact across the region.

Euro–Mediterranean research cooperation should promote inclusive and forward-looking agendas. In particular, the European Commission is encouraged to support:

- the development of a **regional quality assurance and recognition framework**, including measures to progressively integrate Southern Mediterranean partners into the Bologna Process and advance mutual recognition of qualifications;
- the embedding of **gender equality** objectives, with a strong focus on women and early-career researchers;
- **targeted investments in digital transformation and AI readiness**, ensuring full and equitable participation of all institutions in joint education, research and innovation;
- the mainstreaming of **sustainability and climate action** across university strategies, joint programmes and research agendas;
- **develop leadership academies, innovation labs, and entrepreneurship programs** targeting young people from the Southern Mediterranean, with a focus on employability and social impact.

The participants of the conference call upon the EU Commission to **embed these recommendations as tangible measures and funding priorities in the action plan for the New Pact for the Mediterranean.**

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