

The Future of Internationalization Overcoming Geopolitical Challenges: Resilience, European Anchoring and Knowledge Equity

A Commentary on the Further Development of the
“Strategy of the Federal and State Ministers of Science for the Internationalization
of Higher Education in Germany”*

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Internationality is a basic prerequisite and core element of excellent research and teaching. The German government has emphasized, most recently in the National Security Strategy, the importance of science and research for the resilience and sovereignty of Europe and Germany, especially that of technology-oriented research and innovation. In order to be able to carry out this research and teaching responsibly in an age of geopolitical tensions, the TU9 Universities rely on the **trinity of resilience, knowledge equity and European anchoring.**

The Russian war of aggression on Ukraine has finally made the changes in the framework of international politics, which have been in the making for a long time, visible and tangible also for science in Europe. The crisis triggered by this is not the only one that massively affects international cooperation - the ongoing system rivalry with China or for instance the violent suppression of the protest movement such as in Iran and Afghanistan also have direct consequences for universities. These range from legal restrictions on research and teaching cooperation to obstacles to mobility and existential threats to the lives of academics and students. All of these threaten research integrity and security in general and academic freedom in particular.

The world community, which finds itself in an increasingly multipolar but globally inseparable world, needs an open and trusting international scientific cooperation to meet the global challenges formulated in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

With their expertise in teaching, research and innovation, the TU9 Universities play a decisive role in shaping the future. By combining their specific expertise in basic research, especially in the natural and engineering sciences, with application-oriented research and innovation, they are indispensable shapers of the necessary transformation. Through responsible internationalization, the TU9 also play an active role in science diplomacy.

For the TU9 Universities, a positive and trusting organization of **international cooperation**, even under complex circumstances, is therefore of central importance - **it is indispensable for the gain of knowledge, the resulting innovations and the acquisition of competencies of their members and also especially their students.** The added value of intensive cooperation and the appreciation of diverse perspectives are part of the self-image of the TU9 Universities and shape their interests in international cooperation. **However, the current challenges mean a recalibration of the existing internationalization strategies, especially with regard to resilience, knowledge equity and European anchoring.**

1 | Resilient Universities

In the shaping of all their performance dimensions, universities move in a field of tension determined by interests, risks and values, but also by political guidelines. Universities need autonomy and reliable political support for their decisions on cooperation. TU9 Universities acknowledge the responsibility that this autonomy entails and create internal structures, expertise and an awareness for the political

dimension of scientific relations. At the same time, the federal and state governments must expand sufficient advisory and information services that bundle knowledge and expertise and reflect on existing regulations in dialogue with the universities and jointly develop new courses of action.

Specifically, this means:

- Where politics uses science as a form of diplomacy, it must conduct diplomacy on the basis of and in the spirit of science: A rule-based order is also needed in science, especially with respect to research integrity and security. Universities can support the development of this basis in cooperation with all relevant actors in science and politics with their expertise. Cooperation with partners in countries that do not share our values can be of great importance in the search for solutions to global challenges. Red lines must also be drawn carefully by policymakers and communicated clearly and consistently.
- Cooperation with proven partners from strong science systems in democratic countries as well as with partners in politically difficult contexts must be substantially promoted in the interest of excellent science and solving global challenges. At the same time, universities should improve their own risk management for politically difficult collaborations as not to be naive about these contexts.
- The export control bodies, especially the Federal Office for Economics and Export Control (*Bundesamt für Wirtschaft und Ausfuhrkontrolle*, BAFA), must be provided with sufficient resources; financially, structurally and in terms of content, in order to be able to make decisions within a reasonable time. At the same time, universities are building up the necessary procedures and structures internally. This requires support in the form of advice, but also additional resources at the state level.
- Visa issuing procedures must be accelerated considerably, made more transparent and efficient, and be more in line with a culture of enabling science and the integration of specialists from abroad.

2 | Knowledge Equity / Fair Cooperation

The TU9 Universities explicitly strive for a fair global scientific community in which structural marginalization is reduced and cooperation succeeds on an equal footing. Central to the cooperation is the principle of fair cooperation - joint research projects and formats of mobility need an equal understanding about their design and their goals. Fair cooperation requires a change in the scientific culture on both sides, which for the universities in Germany goes hand in hand with a more far-sighted and inclusive approach to research cooperation and funding. We want to take greater account of this in our international collaborations. In order for this to succeed, the framework conditions, especially those of the funding agencies, must also be adapted.

Specifically, this means:

- In the case of calls for funding for joint research projects, the identification of topics must already take place together with the partners.
- Funding should be made available directly to the project partners in sufficient amounts, where appropriate. In some partner countries, university staff are often underpaid and therefore have very little capacity to carry out international cooperations. TU9 Universities do not want to be in control of the use of funds or ensure that they are spent correctly. This results in an imbalance in the project hierarchy.
- The promotion and appreciation of multilingualism symbolizes the openness for participation also of non-English speaking partners.

3 | Anchoring in a Strong European Science and Teaching Area

The EU pursues a global approach to cooperation in research and innovation, based on openness to international cooperation and respect for fair competition and shared fundamental values. Anchoring this in a strong European science and teaching area is central for the global competitiveness of German technical universities. Seven of the TU9 Universities are active partners in one of the European University Alliances. The European Universities create a unique intercultural and interdisciplinary learning environment that is capable of integrating local innovation ecosystems as well as learners with different educational backgrounds. This allows us to further advance the dialogue to create innovative and integrative

teaching and learning formats across national borders. TU9 supports the fact sheets developed by the consortium of German universities in the EUN. In addition, we specifically highlight the following:

- The European University Alliances plays an important role in strengthening and transforming the European higher education area and its actors. In order to fulfill their mission, they need resources and legal room for maneuver, which politics must enable or maintain. For this, the universities need flexibility and freedom for innovation and progress and therefore an experimentation clause in the state legislation for the European University Alliances.
- Teaching at TU9 Universities is always research-led. Therefore, the European University Alliances must inevitably integrate the three missions of research, teaching and a broad understanding of transfer and be supported in an uncomplicated and sustainable way within a unified financial framework.
- Research and teaching at TU9 Universities develop the foundations for new technologies and business models and strengthens Europe as a location for innovation. In order for TU9 Universities to develop their potential and make their contribution, EU research funding programs must support a larger share of research in Technological Readiness Levels 1-4 and also think about innovation from the perspective of science.
- For German universities, the European scientific area cannot end at the borders of the EU. We therefore welcome the agreement with the United Kingdom in the context of research funding. Sustainable structures and measures for bilateral cooperation with European partners such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Israel are essential.

**At their conference "Future of Internationalization - Strengthening Excellence, Shaping Strategy" on June 22-23, 2023 in Berlin, the management of the TU9 Universities together with experts from DAAD, DFG and other representatives from scientific organizations and politics agreed on the necessary internal and external framework conditions for international cooperation in geopolitically difficult contexts. The aspects summarized here are a result of the discussions during this meeting.*

We thank all participants for their expertise and their willingness to engage in an open exchange.