The Erasmus+ programme and the Mediterranean cooperation:  
A false start?

Quoting the speech of the Education and Culture Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou stating that "Education is central to our efforts. In order to reach our objectives for a democratic and prosperous Southern Mediterranean, we need to concentrate on young people. They are the main catalyst for social and political change - and they are also the region's future main economic actors." UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union – intends to promote the importance and the necessity to strengthen the international dimension of the new European programme Erasmus+.

Erasmus+ has been indeed recently launched by the European Commission at a time when nearly six million young people are unemployed in the EU – with levels above 50% in some European countries. This demonstrates a significant skills gap in Europe and the whole Mediterranean region that needs to be tackled. Moreover the political and social dynamics which are recently occurring in the Southern Mediterranean area impose the urgency to redefine a better Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

UNIMED since three years ago has daily supported the achievement of a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation thanks to the online petition launched in 2011 to the EU Commission in order to promote a Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus. The petition has been signed by several politicians, professors, students and researchers from both Mediterranean shores whose signatures have been delivered to the Education and Culture Commissioner.

The recent launch of the Erasmus+ programme, aimed at boosting skills and employability, as well as modernising Education, Training, and Youth work opportunities for over 4 million Europeans, does not yet include two actions targeted at cooperation with partner countries - international credit mobility and capacity building action in higher education. The credit mobility action aims at supporting exchanges of students and staff leading to recognised credits (extension of the present intra-European Erasmus programme), whereas the capacity building action envisages cooperation projects between European and non-European universities aiming at modernising their higher education systems.

These two actions are funded from the EU external cooperation instruments, which should be launched at a later stage in 2014. We are seriously risking to loose one academic year or more and not give an answer to university cooperation with countries of the Southern Mediterranean during a tremendously important political and social time.

Therefore, UNIMED strongly reiterates the urgency and the importance to support international cooperation related to international credit mobility and capacity building actions in higher education with Southern Mediterranean countries with an adequate allocation of funds addressed to young people of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean basin with goal to establish an area of research and university education in the Mediterranean region to strengthen the Mediterranean scientific community.