

“Forming the Higher Education Area of the Islamic World”

Vice Chancellors’ Forum

Ankara Declaration – 2017

Forming the higher education area of the Islamic world is an important step that will enhance cooperation in the Islamic geography in every field. It is necessary for the Islamic countries to support their development process with academic entities which are competent in technological and scientific fields and which will be able to come up with solutions to the problems of the society. This process might advance in a more productive way if the countries share their own knowledge and experiences and act on a common basis.

Vice Chancellors’ Forum 2017 was held on the 26th and 27th of July 2017 with the participation of 334 Rectors/Vice Chancellors/Presidents from 37 countries from the Islamic world. The forum which was organized with the theme “Forming the Higher Education Area of the Islamic World” aims to strengthen the collaboration among the universities of the Islamic world.

The importance of forming the higher education area of the Islamic world and acting together for development, social welfare, technological and scientific progress was emphasized at the welcoming ceremony of the Forum which was held at the Presidential Palace under the auspices of our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Our Hon. President stated that the Forum which is expected to be a basis for a process of discussing the higher education problems and developing new opportunities for cooperation in our geography of civilization, should be a common working platform keeping in mind that the essence of the Islamic civilization is brotherhood and solidarity.

We would like to extend our highest gratitude to our President Hon. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for His auspices and support.

The importance of scientific infrastructure in increasing the welfare of the Islamic countries is pointed out at the opening session of the Forum. It is stated that the current legislative and administrative differences among the higher education systems of the Islamic world and the lack of integration of those systems leads to the waste of resources in many fields.

Taking into account the previous experiences, cooperation and partnerships that will take place at different levels will lead to a stronger Islamic world. Given the human resource of all the Islamic countries, we should pass beyond the imitation of the existing programmes in shaping this resource.

It is necessary to have a mutual consensus, and more important than that, a common perspective on every level of student and faculty member mobility, joint programs and equivalence. A common quality assurance system is of central importance for this process and it is the assurance of the process in search of better scientific outcomes.

Several meetings have been held among the Islamic countries aiming to support cooperation in the field of higher education. The Vice Chancellors' Forums are important as they have been meetings that provide cooperation at the vice chancellors level. The previous Vice Chancellors' Forums have opened up an opportunity for collaboration. The primary goal is to bring our resources together, provide scholarships, support mobility and cooperation, and establish centres of academic research and excellence. The previous forums had positive outcomes in the formation of friendship among the academics and strengthening the relations and dialogue between the institutions.

This forum, which was held yesterday and today, was realized with more visionary and tangible goals and it is perceived as a meeting mature enough to develop unique solutions.

The steps that will be taken in the field of higher education are crucial for an independent and strong Islamic world. We must act with self-confidence on the basis of knowledge and science in order to attain our goals. Education means the future. The important thing is to understand and comprehend the future trends. If an educator can envision the future, he can prepare the generation for what is ahead. The current competencies may not be sufficient in a competitive and futuristic approach. The patterns of acquiring scientific qualifications for the future is important. We should be able to produce fast and innovative solutions to the wide-range intricate problems ahead of us. Collaborations that will be developed in this context will lead to rapid and productive steps.

The outcome of the two-day interactive panel sessions are as follows:

1. **A clear vision of higher education of the Islamic world needs to be developed.** The establishment of a common qualifications framework and quality assurance system is not solely a technical issue. It should contain both universal and local values. It is possible **to create an overarching framework that takes into consideration the common values of the Islamic world while preserving universal values.** The Islamic world should determine its own concepts in this field of study and act keeping in mind that education is a humanitarian initiative.
2. Islamic countries have different educational systems and qualifications frameworks. A framework for overarching qualifications in higher education should be developed as a basis in accordance with the national priorities of the countries; and common points and minimum standards of these qualifications should be determined in a way that will form the basis of **the higher education area of the Islamic world.**

3. It is necessary to act together with the contribution of different stakeholders in the mutual qualifications framework and especially with the support of decision-making institutional bodies during this process.
4. Standards and principles of quality assurance in higher education should be formed in connection with the overarching qualifications framework that will be established. These standards and principles should also be relevant to the other successful systems around the world.
5. **QA agencies that carry out evaluation and accreditation for institutional quality assurance based on programmes in the Islamic countries** should define their process in accordance with the established standards and principles. The agencies within this context should form an overarching platform to share their experiences and support each other throughout the process.
6. **Quality assurance systems** could be varied in different categories according to the needs of the countries on the ground of standards and principles.
7. There should be studies in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing cooperation between **qualifications-based quality assurance agencies** in the Islamic countries.
8. A basic supranational framework should be defined for **recognition and equivalence processes** in order to support and facilitate the mobility of workforce among the Islamic countries and prevent brain drain. The steps to be taken in the field of recognition and equivalence should be able to directly support international student exchange. Recognition and equivalence processes should be developed by making use of successful national and international experiences.
9. **Common credit systems** are the basis of mobility. Pilot universities and programmes should be determined for comparison and compliance of the

programmes in this field, the process for credit transfer should be clarified on common grounds and this process should be standardised.

10. Developing and supporting the existing exchange programmes that provide **the exchange of students and faculty members in the Islamic world** is of vital importance as the first step. **The Mevlana Exchange Programme carried out by Turkey is one of the main programmes that plays an important role in the exchange of students and faculty members among the Islamic countries.** This programme should be supported financially and be transformed into an international body used for the exchange of students and faculty members among the Islamic countries.
11. The Project-based Mevlana Exchange Programme yields more fruitful results, especially in terms of faculty members and researchers. Therefore, **project-based exchange programmes** must be supported initially.
12. The level of academic achievement of the universities is naturally not the same. Concerns may rise even if there is an accreditation of education quality. However it should not be an obstacle against **common programmes (Joint/Dual/Double Degree)**. In this context, universities should be evaluated according to their fields of study and programmes, not in a biased way, and strong fields of study should be taken into consideration.
13. **Joint/dual/double diploma programmes** can provide significant advantage during education process, at the same time they support the mobilisation of professional networks and the workforce by enabling people to explore countries and cultures. The main problems in **joint/dual/double programmes** are the difference in language and education systems. Problems that may arise from the differences in education systems should be addressed through the qualifications framework, quality assurance process and the steps to be taken in the field of recognition and equivalence. Bilingual programmes can accelerate the

process at this stage. It will also be an important achievement for our students to learn the language of an Islamic country through common programmes that require different language proficiencies. This should be seen as an opportunity and, at the same time, a tool that enables unity and cultural interaction among students.

14. It is important to establish an online interface platform for universities to get to know each other, to acquire information about each other, and in particular to encourage joint diploma programmes. This platform can act as a virtual office. CoHE will take the necessary steps on this matter.
15. Fast-growing online education technologies should also be evaluated as a platform for communication and cooperation.
16. Platforms for partnership among the Islamic countries should be structured not only by taking into account the academic programmes, but also by taking into consideration the research infrastructures in the universities.
17. It was agreed that the Vice Chancellors' Forum should be held annually and it is necessary to form thematic expert/working groups until the next forum.