

DECISION  
2024-01-03

## Stockholm Trio's response to the European Commission's call for evidence "Boosting research security in EU"

The University Alliance Stockholm Trio<sup>1</sup> expresses its appreciation to the European Commission's call for feed-back regarding "Boosting research security in EU".

We agree with the European Commission's statement and the necessity of "Openness and international collaboration in world-class research". Academia is, by its very nature, international. Today, geopolitical considerations force us to limit the total openness, however in Europe, academic freedom must stand as a cornerstone. Collaborations among researchers often work well regardless of the country in which they operate, and this, in itself, is a potent political force that can influence those in power. Continued belief in the value of research as a free and shared global arena and in science diplomacy, meaning that higher education institutions through their global collaborations, constitute an important force. Scientific collaboration and exchange are outstanding tools to foster international relations, promote cooperation, and address global societal challenges. The role of science and technology in addressing global challenges is crucial in climate change, public health, and sustainable development, while fostering peaceful and constructive international relationships.

*Europe's guiding principle should be "As open as possible, as restricted as necessary".*

### Balancing Openness vs Security

The need for research security that the European Commission is concerned about must be further specified. It is not clear if it is about combating human rights abuses in non-EU countries, or protecting field researchers being imprisoned, OR is it about the risk of espionage and protection of economic values of research and innovation? The nature of different risks calls for different types of action – at different levels – whether a security action should be at the individual researcher's, institutional, national, or European level. The potential risks of engaging in international collaboration should always be weighed against the risks associated with avoiding collaboration. The intended actions at European level should be recommendations with the goal to facilitate international collaboration, and not hinder internationalization. It should be a guiding document which is clear and easy to apply – also for the individual researcher.

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<sup>1</sup> The University Alliance Stockholm Trio (Karolinska Institutet, the Royal Institute of Technology and Stockholm University) is a dynamic academic environment that promotes the international research and educational environment and the three universities together one the largest receivers of European funding.

## Responsible Internationalization

Many Higher Education Institutions are discussing responsible internationalization. In fact, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions has a check list for [Global Responsible Engagement](#) based on Shih, T., Gaunt, A. & Östlund, S. (2020). Responsible internationalisation: Guidelines for reflection on international academic collaboration. Stockholm: STINT, 2020.

Achieving responsible internationalization involves gaining insights from colleagues within institutions or between institutions. The responsibility for this matter should be held by the higher education institutions themselves, rather than by top-down actions.

Talent and excellence are not geographically bound, but need to be fostered and supported. It is important to make sure that the intended recommendation does not hinder curious, creative, and innovative minds to collaborate with each other. In this context, it is crucial for Europe to continue being an appealing workplace for researchers from around the globe.

The partners of the Stockholm Trio, together with STINT and Lund University have been strongly engaged in the work developing the concept of Responsible Internationalisation. This has been summarized in a forthcoming report (Shih, T. (2023). Responsible Internationalization - Why, What and How? <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/gz5m8> discusses the relationship between research security and responsible internationalization".

## International Cooperation within the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

The European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, currently Horizon Europe, is an important tool to facilitate international cooperation. However, one problem is that the increase of the TRL levels makes international cooperation more difficult because of IPR issues. We argue that there is a need to have more cooperation on lower TRL levels as a basis to stimulate innovation, something which would also facilitate international cooperation outside Europe.

## Recommendations

- Academic freedom and institutional autonomy must be safeguarded. Europe must always remain as a place where researchers and scholars are protected.
- Europe's guiding principle should be "As open as possible, as restricted as necessary".
- If any action is limiting international collaboration, it is important that risk assessments and limitations are based on clear and up-to-date information. It must be made explicit why certain actors are of concern and for what reasons.