

Panelists: Irina Ferencz (Academic Cooperation Association), Julia Linder (DAAD / KIWi), Milica Popović (Central European University), Barbara Tasser (Universität Innsbruck)

Moderator: Gerhard Volz

Volz sets the direction of the discussion which is translating what we know and what was discussed in the previous panel into the reality of the day-to-day practice. There seems to be a gap between value driven internationalization and our own interests. How do strategy building and implementation procedures at universities look like? What role do the guidelines play?

Ferencz on what she observes in the discussions on a European level: In several key strategic documents, the EU has been pushing for a more restrictive approach in the field of research (distinct from higher education cooperation). In higher education, we can remain as open as we used to be. Geopolitical language has, however, resurfaced in European strategies for universities. ACA has sought to position itself together with its member agencies between the dichotomy of cooperation, competitiveness and critical awareness. The discussion of values is not a new one and the events this year pushed us to debate those values and take a clear stance.

Recommended reading: [Science Diplomacy for a Multipolar World \(DAAD\)](#) | [Vision for strengthening the international dimension of Finnish higher education and research by 2035](#)

Popović on embracing the idea of academic freedom while keeping up the cooperation among universities to remain globally competitive: There are six fundamental values at the core: (1) institutional autonomy, (2) academic freedom, (3) academic integrity, (4) student and staff participation in higher education governance, (5) public responsibility of and (6) for HE. There is a lot of attention that has gone beyond universities – e.g. NGOs providing guidelines – but the academic community should be the one creating guidelines.

Recommended reading: [Publications of the Global Observatory on Academic Freedom](#)

Tasser argues that in terms of confidence and trust for the future, we need to work in alliances and networks (checks and balances). It is important to diversify exchange activities and to use new concepts like short term and blended mobilities as well as virtual exchanges. She encourages to participate in the European University alliance and emphasizes her point with examples from her day-to-day experience at the University of Innsbruck (e.g. involvement in Africa-UniNet that allows a combination of top down decision making to participate and bottom up process to address individually the researches in cooperation with African universities).

Linder introduces the [KIWi compass](#) that provides universities with guidance and information in increasingly volatile environments to help them successfully initiate international cooperations. The six criteria in the catalogue are (1) security situation on the ground, (2)

wider political imperatives, (3) constitutional and social political framework, (4) opportunities and risks associated with a given academic system and two institution specific criteria.

Discussion / Questions to the panel:

- *How do you see the individual responsibility in this discussion (students and staff)?*
Tasser: Each individual is requested to reflect the world's situation and to actively participate when it comes to collaborative processes.
Ferencz: The average academic is not fully equipped to fully assess the risk of those situations, that's why we need the collaborative approach.
Popović: Individuals have an institutional responsibility; we don't exist in vacuums.
- *What was the reaction of the partners of programmes that were shut down?*
Tasser reports only neutral answers from partners because they cannot expose themselves.
Linder gives a different perspective from Afghanistan, where there is too much fluctuation on the positions in the HE sector. There are huge restrictions on education for women and girls. A lot of researchers have been put at risk for collaborating with European partners for decades and are afraid of being left behind.
Ferencz: ACA and the network of funding national agencies was united in sending a clear message in response to the Russian invasion by stopping cooperation on an institutional level. For many organisations, that meant a 180-degree turn for decades-long cooperations.
- **Volz** asks the panelists *what recommendations they would give to institutions on how to proceed and what to observe without getting lost in the jungle of information.*
Ferencz: This crisis of confidence is present on an institutional level, on an individual level it might be different. There is a lot of value in exchanges within the national context. An important prerequisite is a fruitful national debate.
Popović: Donald Trump issued a decree to stop collaborations with Chinese institutions. There are already studies showing how damaging that decision was for all Asian-origin scientists. It is important to keep in mind the importance of policy and discourses and how they affect individuals.
Tasser: Comprehensive internationalisation of our HE institutions is key as well as pushing for more recognition and valorisation for the international engagement of academics.
Linder: There are huge benefits in collaborations, the objective is to maintain them even in volatile conditions. The goal is to not shy away from the challenges. The idea behind an integrated risk management system is to avoid immediate ad hoc responses but to integrate them in a systematic approach; that takes human/financial resources.