II FORUM of European Universities Alliances

EU23
SPANISH PRESIDENCY
COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

THEMATIC SESSION II
Thursday 14th September 15:00h-16:30h

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTIVITIES OF EUROPEAN ALLIANCES

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and societal challenges facing Europe and the world increase the need for researchers to collaborate across borders, institutions, and disciplines. **A strong research and innovation dimension of European Universities Alliances is of crucial importance as they facilitate unprecedented levels of transnational research collaboration between their partner institutions** and are well positioned to contribute to the competitiveness and leadership of Europe, in knowledge creation, skills development and innovation through research..

European University Alliances stimulate the building of joint research environments at the alliance level, across institutions, disciplines, and sectors, including for example their work towards common infrastructures, joint research activities, career development processes and research-driven learning. They are driving the excellence dimension of European higher education more broadly and have already provided evidence of transformational change in support of the European Research Area (ERA). As European Universities Alliances progress towards true European Universities, they will be recognised as consolidated transnational research and innovation ecosystems, attracting talents and creating a snowball effect on European research quality and excellence.

Alliances help create the appropriate conditions for **allowing education, research and innovation to cooperate more smoothly with each other**. **Such synergy** is an important principle for efficient transmission of latest research results to the students and vice-versa. Students at all levels are encouraged to take part in the diverse research and innovation projects developed by Alliances in structured and innovative ways. This is important to equip students and researchers with both field specific and transversal skills thus contributing to the implementation of the **European Skills Agenda**. European Universities Alliances are key enablers of **local and regional development** across the ecosystems where they operate, realising social and economic development across the ERA, and creating impact through regional engagement with society and stakeholders.

It is vital to align the great efforts made to support the objectives set for European Universities Alliances through Erasmus+ and the European Education Area by the European Council with the other existing EU funding schemes such as Horizon Europe and Digital Europe, and in line with the European Innovation Agenda. As the current Horizon 2020 Science with and for society (SwafS) projects come to a close, the development of targeted competitive funding instruments to enable the further development of joint research support structures and to incentivise these bottom-up research collaborations are key to strengthen the ties between individual academics/researchers/professional support staff across institutions.

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PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The **overall objective of this session** is for attendees to better understand how the joint research and innovation ecosystem of the alliances is developing. There will be a focus on understanding the challenges being overcome, the approaches being taken, the benefits for both its members and the greater European research community as well as the contribution being made to policy development and impact delivery at national, regional and EU level and finally what is needed for the continued development of the Research and innovation agenda of alliances.

To achieve this objective, this session will examine how alliances are working across their partner institutions to **progress the development of innovative structures and supports to create and implement joint research environments**. We will examine the challenges faced, how further growth can be stimulated and how work to date not only contributes to the implementation of the **ERA** (2021-2024 and beyond) strategic agenda but also serves to demonstrate a living lab for the hyperconnectivity across the ERA action areas.

The session will also examine **the value of the alliances, not only for its widening members, but for the transformational potential across all of and indeed beyond its membership**. Attendees will be able to reflect on the unique perspectives and value sets we can learn from such these strategic cooperative structures and how that learning can be utilised when developing international collaborations

From **a policy perspective, attendees will learn about how the alliances are utilising a research enhanced transdisciplinary multi-mission approach to - besides the European Education Area-, also positively impact policy areas such as the New European Innovation Agenda and the European Skills agenda and their interaction with the ERA**

Attendees will also hear of the **aspirations and ambitions of the alliances to continue to progress the Research and innovation mission into the future of the alliance** for the benefit of the ERA and EEA and, what supports and instruments, both internal and external, are needed to enable such ambition to be realised.

There will be amble opportunity for audience participants to ask questions and share their views and experiences to enable a well-rounded interaction on all of the discussion topics.

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- **There is considerable alignment between the ERA (2021-2024) strategic agenda and the development of a joint research and innovation ecosystem in an alliance.** The alliances are pioneering **good models of practice to ERA implementation**, addressing, and exploring connections across ERA actions and helping to realise the ERA. Whilst much has been achieved to date, there are reflections to be considered both for the continued progression of their R&I agenda to incentivise bottom-up research collaborations as well as for the development of the next ERA Policy agenda. How have alliances gone about building a joint research support environment and how does it contribute to the ERA (2021-2024) strategic agenda implementation. What insights are there for understanding the connection points across ERA action areas? Do the alliances have a key role to play both in relation to driving out **research assessment reform and supporting the progression of Open Science**?

- The alliances have a valuable role to play in contributing to **local, regional, and European innovation development.** The alliances are strengthening ties and reinforcing cooperation with non-academic actors and citizen science **through its multi mission approach** which will help deliver the objectives of the **European Innovation agenda.** Alliances are bringing an inter and **transdisciplinary** approach across its missions which can stimulate radical innovations which are human centred. How can alliances complement other cooperative structures to deliver benefit to the innovation ecosystem? What are the challenges faced by alliances? What aspirations do alliances have in terms of driving progress in the local and regional innovation ecosystems? What support structures do alliances have in place and what more are required to enable the alliances to reach their full potential?

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

- The **European Skills Agenda** is central to a successful digital and transition and the R&I agenda of the alliances through researcher competencies development, producing skilled graduates capable of critical and entrepreneurial thinking is a flagship action. **Research enhanced education is also key to this action**. How are the alliances encompassing and supporting the integration of all the missions of a University to really build a joint inter-university campus with human capital development at the core? How can alliances respond to and reflect the proposed research competency framework in their R&I agenda? how can and do the alliances support entrepreneurial skills development within the context of authentic environments? What role is there for alliances in enabling staff and students to think more critically in an increasing AI contextual world?

- **Capacity building, widening and international cooperation.** Widening participation and spreading excellence is essential to creating a single European market for research. There is acknowledged benefit to the HEI alliance members in widening countries and transformational potential across all alliance members as the alliances drive systematic and structural change at all levels. Are alliances through enabling partnerships of parity and equity an effective instrument to offset the east west divide in Europe? How is the geographical spread in alliances benefiting the R&I agenda? What role can the alliances play in developing and delivering a European Excellence Initiative?

Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-2020 Call – Pilot 1 and Towards a European Excellence initiative Task 1 Policy Report: Assessment of the Horizon 2020 support to the European University initiative.

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

The R&I agenda of the alliances is strongly linked in most instances to addressing global challenges – to progressing towards the SDGs. With only 7 years left before 2030 making good use of scientific knowledge, technology and innovation is essential if further progress is to be made. How has the SDGs influenced the R&I agendas of alliances and the desire of the alliance to internationally collaborate? What added value can alliances bring to such International collaboration? As the alliances work to develop more international collaboration (and are referenced in agendas such as the AU-EU Innovation agenda), set against a changing geopolitical world there are often, it seems, opposing values –, open science, science diplomacy, versus knowledge security, strategic autonomy (all linked to the ERA) – How are alliances approaching international R&I collaboration and the challenges in balancing out these values within the research and innovation arena?

- **The road ahead - looking forward. Building our future– looking forward.** We are also approaching the **mid-term review of the current EU funding period** and the start of the negotiations on the **next Multiannual Financial Framework.** Whilst much has been achieved in building the R&I agendas of alliances in a short period of time, the **SwafS projects are drawing to a close and the results of the first Horizon Europe pilot European Excellence Initiative are known. It is therefore an appropriate time to give** consideration needs to the **ambitions and aspirations** of the alliances going forward in terms of progressing the research support structure and the research itself. How can we marry the need for competitivity and excellence with capacity building in alliances? What **challenges** do alliances face in facilitating enhanced transnational cooperation in R&I in terms of policies on joint ethics, IP and knowledge valorisation, shared infrastructure, common Human resources strategy and changing geopolitics. What targeted instruments are needed in the **short term** to allow the continued progression of the R&I agenda and what aligned frameworks for collaboration and funding are needed to support a **longer term** integrated multi-mission approach. Without funding (competitive) to continue to support progression of the R&I mission, can the European Universities alliances really achieve the ambition that was set out in 2017 and can the alliances be globally competitive based on only development of its educational mission? (An indepth discussion on Financial sustainability and coherence of the European University initiative with EU and Member State policies will be the subject of a separate session at the II forum of European Universities Alliances on Friday 14th September 2023).

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SESSION OUTCOMES

The session which explored how the alliances are working to develop, support and deliver their R&I agendas ascertained that there was **great complexity involved and a need for a good governance structure and related policies to support the evolution of a joint R&I ecosystem**. The discourse highlighted time and time again the benefit of the R&I mission for the education mission and vice versa and that the inclusion of R&I as part of a synergistic multi-mission approach reflects and aligns with the connectivity that exists between and within European policies and that this alignment is giving the alliances a key role in enabling their delivery. This synergy is seen in how the alliances are pioneering transformational change in support of the ERA actions, whilst also working to affect implementation of the European skills agenda, and the European Innovation agenda and of course the European Education area. As an example, the stimulus of entrepreneurial thinking and skills development in a student's learning experience is linked to the support for innovation within alliances so that the creation of a broader framework that connects research students to the overall alliance multi-mission ecosystem is vital.

In response to whether even in the presence of a joint support structure for R&I, researchers would wish to work together, it was acknowledged that whilst some researchers may have their own networks set up, others and in particular younger researchers do not, and in any regard all researchers want to work with trusted partners whose expertise is complementary and where support services have also enabled trusted connections with their counterparts. Alliances are overcoming barriers to interdisciplinarity and are working to ensure community and wider ecosystem engagement with Research and Innovation and this focus on authentic environments can also allow for sustainable approaches to be reflected and progressed within student based learning and research challenges. This is further amplified by having a wide geographic and cultural spread in alliances. Science is global and as alliances progress their ambition for more international collaboration, they will address the balance of issues such as open science, knowledge security and strategic autonomy.

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SESSION OUTCOMES

The alliances have developed in a relatively short period of time deep trusted transnational partnerships of engagement through a parity of esteem approach which moves away also from knowledge siloes and it is this move away from siloes which allows them to address collaboratively, global challenges and to stimulate innovations regionally, nationally and at European level, in a way that is human centred, important for a just green and digital transition.

The recent pilot **European Excellence Initiative call**, which has as its focus the widening countries, did not prove to be an instrument fit for purpose in terms of enabling the progression of the broader R&I agenda of the alliances.

In terms of the **next steps**, whilst much has been achieved, more support for capacity building is needed and without a future funding stream which is inclusive of R&I, we run the risk of not being able to enable the full transformative capacity of the alliance, aligned with the ERA and in synergy with the EEA, and failing to really achieve the ambition of being globally competitive. The missions are all linked in multiple ways and supporting synergies between the missions will allow for each mission to be more fully realised. Alliances need R&I capacity building within the context of competition and excellence. Much as the alliances themselves are working in a non siloed multi-mission approach, so too is there a need for an integrated multi-mission funding stream post 2027 but even ahead of that the alliances need a mechanism in the shorter term to maintain the progress of the R&I agenda. The alliances will continue to work with DG EAC and DG RTD to highlight the synergies between research and education and to help build an investment pathway to facilitate a multi-mission approach. The support from Member States is however vital in this regard.

MODERATOR:

Ms Doris Alexander, Chair FOR EUR&I subgroup. CHARM-EU Alliance

Doris has worked in Research Management Administration since 1994, taking up her current post as Associate Director of European Engagement in 2019 and is responsible for the development of strategies of engagement, working to get early insight on new EU policy/initiatives so as to maximise the opportunity space for Trinity. She is currently engaged in the implementation of aspects of the ERA policy agenda. She has been involved in several EC stakeholder groups including the co-creation of the European Universities initiative, has a management role in the CHARM-EU alliance and is the Chair of the R&I subgroup of the FOREU1 network (the network of the 17 European Universities alliances funded through the first Erasmus+ pilot call). Doris served on the board and Policy and Representation Committee of the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) and was the inaugural vice chair of the COIMBRA Group Research Officers grouping. She is currently on the steering group of the European Research Projects Managers Group of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). She has represented Ireland on the Expert Group of Member states on the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreements and is the University contact for Science Business, Europe.
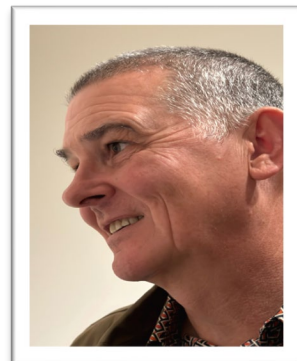
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PARTICIPANTS

PANELISTS:

Dr. Joerg Niehoff, Policy Coordinator University Business cooperation. DGEAC. European Commission

Joerg Niehoff is Deputy Head of Unit for "ERA, Spreading Excellence and Research Careers" in the Research and Innovation Directorate General of the European Commission. The Unit is responsible for the design and implementation of the ERA policy agenda, coordinates the ERA governance, develops a policy for research talents and careers, and empowers higher education institutions. The unit is also responsible for promoting the Spreading of Excellence and preparing the Horizon Europe work programme on "Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area".

Joerg has more than 15 years of experience with the coordination of national research policies and programmes and European Partnerships.

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Prof. Paweł Śniatała, General Coordinator. EUNICE Alliance

He is Vice-Rector for International Relations at Poznan University of Technology (PUT) and the leader of the EUNICE European University project. He holds a M.S. degree in Telecommunications, M.S. degree in Computer Science and Ph.D. degree in Microelectronics - all from PUT, Poland. In 2016 he received the habilitation degree (D.Sc.) in Electronics. From 1998 to 2002 he worked in the Department of Computer Engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology (USA). He returned to PUT to take up the position of Vice-Dean for Industrial Cooperation at the Faculty of Computing from 2016 till 2020. He has also completed the joint international MBA programme of George State University and Poznan University of Economics. His interests focus on VLSI circuits for digital and mixed analog-digital signal processing systems. Following his computer science background, he is also involved in interdisciplinary research projects related to eHealth area and cybersecurity issues. He is currently involved in the H2020 project CAPABLE - "CAncer PAtients Better Life Experience". He is an author and co-author of more than 100 publications including three monographs. He has contributed significantly to PUT's success in coordinating EUNICE European University and other projects with the Alliance partners (a SWAFS project - REUNICE, Erasmus+ KA2 projects and several projects at the national level).

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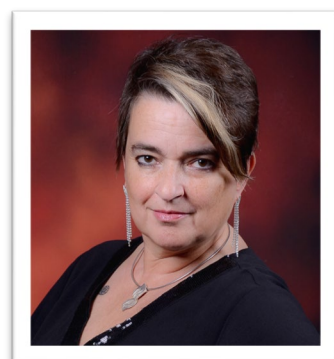**Dr. Eva Méndez,** Representant. YUFE Alliance

Eva Méndez holds a PhD in Library and Information Sciences (LIS) and is an expert in metadata. She defines herself in her Twitter profile as an 'open knowledge militant' (@evamen). She has been a lecturer at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M), LIS department since 1997. She has been an active member of several international research teams, advisory boards, and communities including DCMI, OpenAire, Metadata2020, RDA, etc. In 2005-06 she was awarded a Fulbright Research Scholarship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA). She has taken part in and led several research projects and acted as advisor to many more. She is currently involved in YUFERING where she leads the WP related to Open Science. In 2015 she won the Young Researcher of Excellence award of her University and in November 2017 she was named "Open Data Champion" by SPARC Europe. Over the years, Eva Méndez has taken on significant administrative roles at UC3M, including Deputy Vice-Rector for Scientific Policy (2017-2023), Strategy and Digital Education (2014-2017), and Infrastructures (2011-2014). She is currently the director of the OpenScienceLab research group where she leads different projects of meta-research for Open Science (e.g. Skills4EOSC, Twin4MERIT). She was the President of the Open Science Policy Platform of the European Commission (2018-2020) on behalf of YERUN, and is currently a member of the Steering Board of CoARA (Coalition for the Advancement of Research Assessment).

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Dr. Nicole Birkle, General Secretary. FORTHEM Alliance

After finishing a PhD in Classical Archaeology and some years as a postdoctoral researcher and freelancer, I worked as an EU Liaison Officer at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz from 2014 to 2022. With a special focus on the Social Sciences and Humanities, I supported researchers in preparing proposals for EU funding, also providing information on underlying political goals and strategies. Since 2021, I have been managing coordinator of the FIT FORTHEM project funded by the Horizon 2020, and at end of 2022, I was appointed as one of two General Secretaries of the FORTHEM Alliance, one of the first European University Networks established in 2019 funded by Erasmus+. My special focus within FORTHEM lies on our newly established Research, Innovation, and Transfer Mission, on the FORTHEM Labs and Co-Creation Mission, and also on the support of early career academics by managing the FORTHEM Academy for Early-Stage Researchers. Another particular concern of mine is the promotion of professionalization in research management. In this field, I have been involved in the Professional Development and Recognition Committee of the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA). I am a highly committed European and world citizen.

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Prof. Mats Lundqvist, Vice-President of Utilization at CHALMERS University. ENHANCE Alliance

He is vice-president of utilization at Chalmers. This includes innovation, entrepreneurship and outreach activities within the university as well as through Chalmers group daughter companies, such as Chalmers Ventures, Chalmers Next Labs, CIT and Frauenhofer Chalmers Center.

Mats is a full professor in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship didactics at the Department of Technology Management and Economics. Mats Lundqvist co-founded Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship in 1997 and was its director for more than 20 years. The school has launched more than 1000 entrepreneurial careers and more than 100 sustainable tech-ventures, as an integrated part of Chalmers innovation system. Mats Lundqvist has been engaged in sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation developments on national and university levels in Europe, Asia and the United States. Mats Lundqvist's research centers around university entrepreneurship and engaged scholarship, entrepreneurial education and didactics, sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainability transitions, and entrepreneurial finance. Mats research appears in journals, such as *Research Policy, Science and Public Policy, R&D Management and Technovation*.

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Prof. Marion Fortin, Deputy Vice-President for European Alliances. Engage EU Alliance

Dr. Marion Fortin is a full professor specializing in organizational behavior at University Toulouse Capitole, having earned her PhD from Trinity College Dublin. Her primary research focus is on fairness and justice within organizations. Throughout recent years, Dr. Fortin has assumed several pivotal roles at the University Toulouse Capitole, including Vice President for International Relations, and Director of the EFMD accredited TSM doctoral program. Presently, she serves as the Vice President of the University Toulouse Capitole for the European university alliance ENGAGE. In particular, she plays an active role in the research aspects of the upcoming ENGAGE 2.0, encompassing innovative initiatives tailored for doctoral students and junior scholars**.**

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