

14-15th September 2023

II FORUM of European Universities Alliances

THEMATIC SESSION VII

Friday 15th September 11:30h-13:00h

Financial sustainability and
coherence of the European
Universities Initiative with EU
and Member States' policies

INTRODUCTION

On 3 July the Commission announced the results of the 2023 Erasmus+ call for the European Universities initiative. Adding seven new European Universities alliances, a total of 50 European Universities alliances are now supported under Erasmus+. They involve more than 430 higher education institutions of all shapes and sizes, from all across Europe, be it in capitals, large or small cities, or remote or rural areas. They are located in all Member States and in other countries associated with the Erasmus+ programme and the Western Balkans.

To support the ambition of the alliances, Erasmus+ is injecting EUR 1.1 billion in the European Universities initiative under this budgetary period (2021-2027). This offers almost a trifold increase of the budget per alliance compared to the piloting phase in 2019 and 2020 – from EUR 5 million for three years, to EUR 14.4 million per alliance for four years. This offers a four-year funding perspective with a possible two years' extension until 2028 and 2029 for successful alliances. The research and innovation dimension of the alliances could be funded under Horizon Europe, and in the future under Horizon Europe's European Excellence initiative.

As announced in the European strategy for universities, the Commission services started working with stakeholders and the Member States on an investment pathway for European Universities alliances to provide continuous support to the alliances beyond 2028-2029. The objective is to facilitate a more comprehensive funding approach, complementing the educational dimension with support across all alliances' missions, and seeking for synergies with national and regional funding.

Nevertheless, funding and resource allocation for transnational cooperation remains a challenge for universities, notably when it comes to long-term endeavours such as alliances under the European Universities Initiative as outlined in the EUA briefing on the European Universities Initiative and system level reforms. Beyond discrepancies in national support and co-funding for alliances, there are also big differences in the overall levels of funding for universities in the different countries. Moreover, there are diverse levels of financial autonomy for universities to allocate funding according to their institutional priorities. This is an issue for alliances as it creates an uneven playing field among alliance members. In addition, alliance members must juggle different funding frameworks to cover the costs of joint activities, while the full and real costs of implementing diverse goals may be underestimated or not even known.

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Ensuring financial sustainability of alliances is crucial for achieving the ambitious goals.

As the European Universities Initiative and many of the alliances are going into the next round, it is important to move beyond the project-based approach, learn from the pilot phase and develop long-term solutions taking account of the bigger picture of university funding, financial sustainability and institutional strategy.

The aim of the session is to go beyond the problem diagnoses and explore possible ways forward together with representatives from universities, the European Commission, national funders and funding experts, discussing examples of national support mechanisms and experiences of universities from the pilot phase.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

This session will address key issues, such as ensuring financial sustainability of alliances and coherence of EU and national policies in this regard:

- What are the specific challenges for universities when it comes to funding transnational cooperation and how does this affect the alliances?
- How to ensure alliances' long-term financial sustainability? What can we learn in this regard from the pilot phase?
- What is the role of the EU and the national level in this?
- What can universities themselves do?

These and more questions will be discussed in this parallel session between representatives of universities, the European Commission, national funders and funding experts.

SESSION OUTCOMES

There was agreement among the speakers and participants of the session that ensuring adequate funding for European Universities alliances is a major challenge that needs to be addressed jointly by all actors at institutional, national, regional and European levels. Better alignment of different EU programmes as well as national support is important, as is more transparency about national co-funding available in different countries and the related conditions.

This also calls for strengthening universities' core funding and financial autonomy. To be sustainable in the long-term, cooperation in an alliance needs to provide added value to the achievement and fulfilment of the universities' goals and missions and be fully integrated into institutional strategies. Financial support must be provided in a synergetic way through aligned, mutually reinforcing European and national funding covering all university missions and allowing institutions to allocate funding according to their priorities. Funding needs to match the ambitions in order to enable universities to work in service of society and help addressing the big challenges of our times through transnational cooperation.

The discussion about a future investment pathway for alliances initiated by the European Commission is very timely and offers a space for a much-needed further dialogue on this crucial topic.

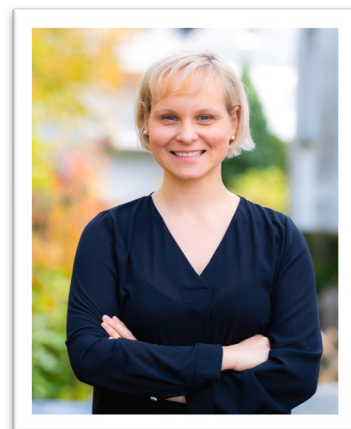
PARTICIPANTS

MODERATOR

Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Deputy Director for Policy Coordination and Foresight at EC.

Anna-Lena has been working at the European University Association (EUA) in various positions since 2011, first on university governance and funding and since 2017 in policy coordination. In her current position as Deputy Director for Policy Coordination and Foresight, she coordinates EUA's positioning and advocacy on the European Universities Initiative and transnational cooperation and currently co-leads EUA's UniFE project, a future thinking exercise looking at universities and the future of Europe. She represents EUA in various working groups in the context of the European Education Area and the European Research Area and is a frequent speaker and moderator at events. Prior to joining EUA, Anna-Lena worked at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education & Culture on higher education policy and the Erasmus Programme.

Anna-Lena holds a Master's degree in European Political and Administrative Studies from the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium as well as a Magister degree in Communication Science, Political Science and Philosophy from the University of Münster, Germany. During her studies she spent one year at the Institute of Political Sciences of Bordeaux, France. Besides her work for EUA, Anna-Lena also works as an independent coach for personal and professional development and leadership since mid-2023.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot. Director for *Youth, Education and Erasmus+* European Commission.

She is in charge of European cooperation on higher education, schools and youth policy, managing Europe's flagship programme for education, training, youth and sport [Erasmus+](#) with a budget over EUR 26 billion 2021-2027. She launched and manages the [European Solidarity Corps](#), an EU youth volunteering programme, and coordinated the 2022 European Year of Youth. She launched flagship actions under the European Education Area and the EU Youth Strategy, such as European Universities, Teacher Academies and DiscoverEU.

She has previously held various positions within the European Commission in the field of strategy and investment in education, employment policy, European Semester, European cohesion funds, cultural policy and business statistics. She studied economics, business, political science and EU affairs in Sweden, France and Belgium, including an Erasmus student exchange. She is an [Eisenhower Fellow](#). Twitter: [@sophiabrussels](#)



PARTICIPANTS

Raul Ramos. Rector of International Policy of the University of Barcelona.

He is Vice-Rector for Internationalization Policy of the University of Barcelona. Full Professor at the Department of Econometrics, Statistics and Applied Economics of the University of Barcelona, researcher at the Regional Quantitative Analysis Group (AQR-IREA), IZA Research Fellow, GLO Fellow and member of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA).

His research interests include labour market analysis from both regional and international perspectives, with a specific focus on globalization, inequality, unemployment and migration.

He has published extensively on these topics and participated in different research and knowledge transfer projects (European Commission, European Parliament, OECD, UNESCO, Eurofound, among others).

He is currently Co-Director of the Revista de Economía Laboral/Spanish Journal of Labour Economics and Associate Editor of Regional Studies, Regional Science. More details at <http://www.raulramos.cat>



PARTICIPANTS

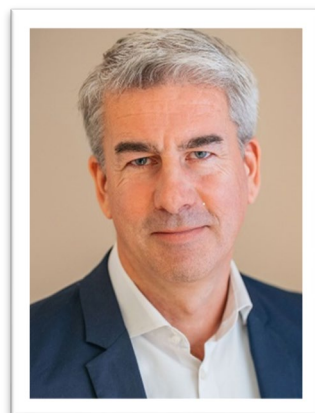
Thomas Estermann. Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development. European Commission.

He is Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development with responsibilities for EUA's work aimed at strengthening universities' autonomy, governance, management and their financial sustainability.

Before joining EUA in 2007, Thomas Estermann was Deputy Head of Strategic Development and Deputy University Director at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, a member of the universities' senate and involved in several reforms in higher education in Austria.

Before entering the University in 1997, he pursued a career as a lawyer. Thomas is member of several European and national committees, expert groups, editorial boards, advisory groups and contributes on a regular basis to higher education management programmes and national higher education reform processes.

He has published on the topic of university funding, governance and management. He holds a Master's degree in law from the University of Vienna.



PARTICIPANTS

Stephan Geifes. Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency Higher Education DAAD.

Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency Higher Education within the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) since Feb 1st 2020. Stephan Geifes has been working for the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) since 1999.

Before his actual position he has been Head of Division Transnational Education and Cooperation Programmes at the DAAD in Bonn since 2013. Prior to this position he was Director of the DAAD Paris Office from 2001 to 2005, Secretary General of the Franco-German University (FGU) from 2005 to 2008 and Scientific Coordinator at the German Historical Institute of Paris from 2008 to 2012.

Stephan Geifes studied History, Sociology, Roman Languages and Political Sciences at the University of Bielefeld, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (EHESS) and at the Institute d'Études politiques (IEP) in Paris. After earning a Master's degree in History from the University of Bielefeld in 1996 he continued his studies at the École nationale d'administration (ENA) in Paris from 1997 to 1999. In 2012 he finished his PhD in History at the University of Bochum.

He has published on international higher education exchange.

