



European
Commission



SPHERE Seminar

European university alliances as
models for transnational cooperation
and means for policy reform

18-19 November 2024

Online

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SPHERE Seminar

European university alliances as models for transnational cooperation and means for policy reform

18-19 November 2024

Via Zoom

Registration is required and available at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYkf-ippjwjEtwdA1QHcJmjeGjn_EozK1E9

The SPHERE seminar will explore the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the university alliances that it supports. In 2019, the European Commission launched the EUI to enhance transnational collaboration among universities through larger alliances. These alliances are promoting innovative, integrated higher education across Europe, aiming to boost student and staff mobility, joint degree programs, and collaborative research projects. Funded under the Erasmus+ program and supplemented by Horizon Europe, the EUI are a key strategy in achieving the European Education Area and plays a significant role in the European Strategy for Universities and the Higher Education Package.

How this matters to NEOs and HEREs: National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) and Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) have confirmed on various occasions their interest to learn more about the university alliances. This might be for diverse reasons:

Participation

- Institutions from the Western Balkans are eligible and can become full partners.
- All EHEA countries can participate as “associates”.
- While HEI from other third countries cannot formally participate or associate in the EUI, and should not benefit from the funding, some alliances include international partners.
- *Note that there are no calls open or planned at present.*

Models for transnational interuniversity collaboration

Institutions that cannot or do not want to participate in the EUI might nevertheless be interested to learn more about the approach, that aims at achieving deep changes in the ways of how institutions exchange and collaborate, and how this benefits their missions and members, and their surrounding communities and economies. It brings up an interesting aspect of how much competition should be, and how much collaboration has to be among HEI, given their role for our societies and the response to global challenges.

Means for stimulating higher education policy reform development and implementation

- The EUI and the alliances that it supports are also expected to contribute the development of more conducive and enabling European and national regulatory frameworks.
- They help to identify and – hopefully - eliminate obstacles for transnational interuniversity cooperation. This concern longstanding commitments of the Bologna Process, e.g. the recognition of periods of mobility at other universities, but also new issues, e.g. the ability of university consortia to establish a legal personality.

The European Commission is currently working with some alliances on two initiatives to enhance collaboration among higher education institutions (HEIs):

1. **European Degree:** This aims to resolve legal and technical issues related to joint programs and degrees caused by differing national legislations.
2. **European University Status:** This would establish a legal framework allowing universities to operate beyond national regulations.

Both initiatives are designed to facilitate collaboration and reduce national obstacles. Set to launch in 2027, they are still in the definition phase, pending approval from EU Member State authorities. These topics will be briefly mentioned in the seminar but not explored in detail.

Purpose of the seminar

The online SPHERE seminar aims to provide participants with insights into the policy and practice of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) through plenary discussions and workshops. While focusing on the EUI and its alliances, the seminar also invites discussions on current European higher education policy and the Bologna Process commitments, targeting those involved in higher education policymaking at all experience levels.

This online SPHERE seminar will provide participants with an opportunity to learn about and discuss the policy and practice aspects of the EUI in plenary discussions and smaller workshop sessions.

Learning outcomes

- **Contextualize the EUI** within broader EU initiatives, including the European Education Area and the Higher Education Package.
- **Enhance understanding** of transnational inter-university collaboration by establishing a joint vision and shared governance responsibilities.
- **Analyze the impact of alliances** on higher education institutions (HEIs), including strategies for involving staff and students and their implications for internationalization.
- **Gain insights into quality assurance** and recognition processes within alliances, assessing the benefits and challenges of joint degrees.
- **Reflect on alliances** as examples that highlight achievements and gaps in the Bologna Process reforms.
- **Explore implications for HERE and EU partner countries**, focusing on participation in alliances and insights from related initiatives and policies.

Programme

Agenda for Day 1 –18 November

9:00 – 10:15

Session 1: Welcome and opening remarks

- Introduction by the SPHERE team

Welcoming remarks and short introductions of European Universities Initiative (EUI)

- Deputy Head of Unit on Higher Education, Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission (DG EAC)
- Head of Sector Capacity Building in Higher Education Unit, Executive Agency Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

Chair: SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

10:15 – 11:30

Session 2: Why engage in the European Universities initiative?

Short presentation by representatives from two alliances and panel discussion

- Secretary General (Una Europa)
- Secretary General (E³UDRES²)
- Deputy Director of Policy Coordination and Foresight, (EUA)

Chair: SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

11:30-12:00

Break

12:00 – 13:00 Session 3: Quality Assurance in interinstitutional collaboration

- Short presentation by the Director of Institutional Development, (EUA)

Panel discussion with:

- Secretary General (Charm-EU)
- Senior Policy Officer (Una Europa)

Chair: SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

13:00 – 13:15 Closing

Brief reflection on the day - feedback from participants

- SPHERE Team

Agenda for Day 2 – 19 November

9:00 – 9:15 Opening of the day

by SPHERE Team

9:15 – 11:00 Session 4: Case studies: Models for transnational cooperation

Presentation 1: Joint programmes, and joint & multiple degrees

- Programme Development & Policy (ENGAGE.EU)
- Coordinator MA Joint Programme (ARQUS)

Presentation 2: Blended mobilities (Bips and short term mobilities)

- Institutional Coordinator (YUFE)

Chair by SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

11:00 – 11:15 **Break**

11:15- 12:15 **Session 5: Panel discussion: European university alliances:
What is in it for the HEREs?**

- Coordinator General (EC2U)
- Secretary General (EUGLOH)

Chair by SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

12:15- 13:15 **Session 6: Future and prospects of the European
Universities initiative**

- Head of ECIU Brussels Office (ECIU)
- Secretary General (Circle U.)

Chair by SPHERE Team

Followed by Q&A

13:15- 13:30 **Closing: Take aways and closing of the event**

SPHERE Team

