



# Call for sustainable and holistic support to European University Alliances

Joint statement of all 41 European University Alliances on the need for long-term sustainable funding that allows Alliances to work across all their missions.

All 41 alliances call on the Member States to urgently support the **establishment of holistic and sustainable long-term funding** to deepen transnational cooperation of European University alliances across all their missions in a coherent way. This will enable the European Universities Initiative to go beyond a short-term project approach and deliver on their long-term, innovative and ambitious vision of future-proof European universities. This funding must (1) **integrate all university's missions** (education, research, innovation, transfer to society) and (2) **combine resources** (Erasmus+ , Digital Europe, Interregional Innovation Investments, member state funding, etc.) reflecting not only the knowledge square approach, but also the infrastructural and other supports needed to drive the development of globally competitive European University Alliances. Finally, it is important that support is (3) **sustainable**, a long-term funding instrument is needed to build sustainable European Universities that can deliver on their vision. The upcoming midterm review of the current European Programmes is an excellent momentum to test and design such a holistic funding instrument.

This statement builds upon the previous Alliance statement on funding needs (8 March 2022), the ERA Policy Agenda, recent Council Recommendations (6 April), communication of EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and Member State representatives and draft Horizon Europe programmes.

The target audience of this statement is the Member States, members of the ERA Forum, and the members of the Programme Committee to WIDERA (Widening participation and strengthening the ERA) of Horizon Europe, NCPs and ministries.



To bridge the crucial period between the current project funding and the future funding instrument, European University Alliances welcome the European Commission initiatives to continue supporting the European University's research missions, as research is central to the work of universities. The current Horizon 2020 SwafS -projects are successful in building European research agendas of alliances, but need continuation also after 2023. Continuation of the current research activities and work on transformation of HEIs that only recently started, must be the priority. Therefore, Member States are asked to:

- **Commit to Action 13 of the ERA Policy Agenda:** Empower Higher Education Institutions to develop in line with the ERA, and in synergy with the EEA. In line with Action 13, Member States are asked to support the development of the **European Excellence Initiative** for integrated and inclusive networks of Higher Education Institutions, including the European Universities.
- Consider launching a competitive Horizon Europe call in 2023 which would provide directly for the **continuation of the existing SwafS projects** secured by the European University Alliances through Horizon 2020.
- **Create a task force** with experts from interested Member States and with representatives from European Universities HEIs, to explore long term **sustainable support for European Universities alliances**.

## ERA Action 13, European Excellence Initiative

Support to ERA Action 13 of the ERA Policy Agenda, the overall ambitions and the specific activities, is of crucial importance to European University Alliances. This is necessary to deliver continued and accelerated institutional reform in R&I, strengthened R&I capacities as well as mainstreaming an excellence culture in science and value creation in HEIs.

Alliances would support the suggestion of a candidate European partnership to be included in the next Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027 and, dependent on the outcomes of the taskforce (see below), piloted within the current Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) and used to test synergies with the Horizon Europe programme for the research and innovation dimension and other EU programmes by 2024 within the remit of their legal bases.

## Continuation of SwafS projects

Member States are asked to consider launching a competitive Horizon Europe call in 2023 and 2024, under WIDERA Destination, Reforming and enhancing the EU Research and Innovation



system or Pillar 3 European Innovation Ecosystems, a means of strengthening the ERA, which would provide directly for the continuation of the existing SwafS projects secured by the European Universities Alliances through Horizon 2020. As continuation of the research activities is the priority of the alliances, to continue their work on the transformation that only started in 2021, the continuation of the SwafS-projects is of crucial importance. The timelines for these calls should ensure that there is no funding gap for the alliances whose Horizon 2020 SwafS projects conclude early 2024 (first generation Alliances) or late 2024 (second generation Alliances).

This call is necessary in order to maintain momentum, enhanced ambition and continuity with the Erasmus+ funding instrument for the European Universities Alliances. This would provide an interim short term solution whilst a longer term sustainable investment plan is explored and developed.

## Task Force

European University Alliances suggest the creation of a taskforce to explore the key objective of long-term sustainable support to allow alliances to work across all their missions. This taskforce must represent a **co-creation process and would include the 41 alliances**, through their informal networks (FOREU1 and FOREU2), European policy-makers and Member States representatives. The task force should have the mandate to test ideas and synergies regarding the design of an innovative strategic approach to sustainable long term alliance funding, taking benefit of the mid-term review of the EU programmes in the current MFF and providing recommendations in preparation for the next MFF

## The European University Alliances

The European University Alliances represent over 280 higher education institutions from all EU Member States) and are the flagships of the European Strategy for Universities. The Alliances remain committed to the transformational agenda enabled to date through Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the engagement of their own resources. The Alliances remain willing to discuss with all relevant stakeholders the establishment of a sustainable financial pathway architecture to allow the long term vision of the alliances to be realised, as a necessary part of a globally competitive European Education and Research Area.



This joint statement directly reflects the communication of EU Commissioner, Mariya Gabriel, of 8 April 2022 that *“the European Universities are paving the way for more systemic, structural and sustainable cooperation across Europe”*. The Commissioner confirmed that in addition to the Erasmus+ funding to be made available, Horizon Europe will provide complementary support to the European Universities initiative. In particular, the Commissioner noted that the Commission has proposed to the Member States to establish in 2023 a ‘European Excellence Initiative’ under the ‘Widening participation and strengthening the ERA’ part of the Horizon Europe programme. In addition, it was also confirmed that the European Commission has proposed within the European strategy for universities to explore the matter as part of the mid-term review of the MFF programmes.

This statement also reflects the Council Recommendations on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation of the 06th April, 2022, which states that European Universities *“are a source of inspiration for the wider higher education community to drive system-level reforms while facilitating better coordination between European higher education and research policies.”* It further states that there should be a mobilisation of *“available funding sources at regional, national and EU level, while taking into account the different national finance systems, to match or complement where possible the Erasmus+ support, complemented in a synergetic way by the support from Horizon Europe, for the participation of higher education institutions in ‘European Universities’.”* It invites the Commission to *“pursue the further development of the European Universities initiative following a bottom-up approach through the Erasmus+ programme, on the basis of the main outcomes of the midterm review of the first alliances. As of 2022, provide sustainable funding for successful existing ‘European Universities’ following a competitive and qualitative call for proposals, and allow for the creation of new ones, based on the principles of geographical balance, inclusion, high quality and excellence. Test synergies with the Horizon Europe programme for the research and innovation dimension and possibly other EU programmes by 2024, within the remit of their legal bases. Take benefit of the mid-term review of the MFF programmes to consider ways of enabling possible innovative approaches for a better joint mobilisation of EU sources of funding, exploiting possible synergies with regional and national funds.”*



Statement of 8 March 2022

## Statement on behalf of FOR EU1 and FOR EU2 European Universities alliances

### Future funding for the European Universities

- The 41 European Universities alliances selected under the first two calls for proposals are seen as key drivers of an **innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area and European Research Area** as well as, more recently, being a **flagship of the European Strategy for Universities**. They are tasked with and are already **exploring and testing innovative and structural models of transnational collaborative change to achieve an integrated approach across education, research and innovation with a view to achieving maximum impact on society** and on the **European Higher Education Area** including through joint utilisation of separate Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 grants.
- The 17 European Universities funded through the first pilot call are currently engaged in developing their proposals for the Erasmus+ Partnerships for Excellence - European Universities call for proposals with the deadline of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 and the possibility of funding for 4 years, max 14.4 million - to **ensure enhanced reach and ambition of their mission** and in that context, **many are articulating an expanded membership**. However, there is currently **no certainty of a complimentary call to support the further development of the Research and innovation agenda leaving a disconnect** not just for an integrated mission approach but also for the inclusion of new partners.
- In order to achieve the **ambitious strategic objectives** set out for the European Universities Initiative, it is important that European University Alliances are enabled – both in terms of **targeted policy and funding support** - to **realise their full potential**.
- **DG RTD is working hard to create a pathway** to provide a competitive funding call in Horizon Europe, through the widening agenda of the ‘Widening and Strengthening the European Research Area’ programme. FOR EU1 and FOR EU2 (representing the 41 European Universities funded through the first and second pilot call and encompassing the 39 Swafs funded alliance projects) believes that support for this or any future funding pathway under Horizon Europe dedicated to European University Alliances is to be welcomed and should remain **excellence-based and competitive**, in line with the very principles of the EUI programme. **However, whilst such a funding channel is to be welcomed, it should be regarded as an interim**



solution to a more required sustainable programmatic approach combining overarching education and R&I funding programmes.

- It is crucial that European University Alliances are supported with a **competitive integrated funding instrument** that provides **holistic and long-term support** across all university missions in the future. This funding instrument should be granted on the **basis of quality, excellence and impact** and be sufficiently **flexible** to allow existing alliances to continue to develop in line with their vision and mission thus **strengthening the programmatic systemic transformative European cooperation that is at the heart of the European Universities**.
- In our view, the development of such an integrated funding instrument for education, research and innovation dedicated to European Universities should be the central focus, as we approach the **mid-term review of the current funding period** and the start of the negotiations on the **next Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027**. FOR EU1 and FOR EU2 are ready to contribute to the co-development of such an instrument with the European Commission, Member States and the higher education stakeholder community at large.
- Furthermore, the future success of European University Alliances depends on communities of academics and researchers being supported to drive transnational collaboration across our research and research informed educational approaches. The development of **targeted instruments to incentivise these bottom-up research collaborations** are crucial not only to strengthen the ties between individual academics/researchers/professional support staff across our institutions but to build a **joint inter-university community with a strong common sense of belonging and to realise a true European University across all university's missions**.