

Workshop:

European University Networks - Regional groupings, thematic networks or strategic alliances?

A contribution to the development of the concept of "European University Networks"

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Background to the "European University Networks" initiative

On 26 September 2017, **French President Macron** proposes at the Sorbonne University in Paris: "*I believe we should create **European Universities** – a network of universities across Europe with programmes that have all their students **study abroad** and take classes in at least two languages. These European Universities will also be **drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence**. We should set for ourselves the goal of creating at least **20 of them by 2024**. However, we must begin setting up the first of these universities as early as the next academic year, with real European semesters and **real European diplomas**.*" ([Link](#))

On 14 November 2017, the **European Commission** publishes the communication "**Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture**" in which it takes-up the proposal of Macron to create European Universities. ([Link](#))

On 14 December 2017, the EU heads of states and governments decide at the **European Council**: "*As a result, the European Council calls on Member States, the Council and the Commission, in line with their respective competences, to take work forward with a view to: [...] strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence **by 2024** of some **twenty 'European Universities'**, consisting in **bottom-up networks** of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a **degree by combining studies in several EU countries** and contribute to the **international competitiveness of European universities**; [...]"*" ([Link](#))

On 15 February 2018, **EU education ministers** discuss at the education Council meeting the implementation of the initiative. The ministers call on the Commission to involve Member States and stakeholders in the process of defining the concept of 'European Universities' and highlight some key aspects for the forthcoming initiative: quality & excellence, securing

inclusiveness and geographical balance, linking education, research and innovation and allowing for different types of cooperation and higher education institutions to participate. To achieve sustainability, ministers point out the importance of EU-level as well as Member States' commitment. ([Link](#))

State of play

In the prospective EU programming cycle, starting in 2021, a new funding line for European University Networks shall be set-up. Erasmus+ is due to be the main driver, in synergy with other EU funding programmes (such as the EU framework programme for research and innovation) and national funding.

The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC) is currently working on a **pilot** for a “European University Networks” **funding line** in the framework of the current Erasmus+ programme. The pilot call for proposals is due to be published in fall 2018; first projects are to start in 2019. For the preparation of the pilot, DG EAC set up an **ad-hoc-expert group** with representative of Member States which is aimed at developing criteria for the selection and evaluation of pilot projects. Additionally, representatives of Higher Education Institutions have been consulted and a **mapping exercise** was launched to identify already existing cooperation models amongst European Higher Education Institutions.

The following **characteristics** of European University Networks are mentioned within the ongoing discussion (non-exhaustive list):

- “European University Networks (EUN)” shall develop **bottom-up**, out of existing networks of European universities
- Existing networks are to be lifted to a “**new level**”; they are meant to create new forms of cooperation / more integration than in existing partnerships
- **Flexible models** of partnerships are imaginable (thematic, territorial, etc.)
- The goal of this measure is to **foster quality**, without creating institutions for only a small group of elites or to cover a geographical region that does not represent entire EU-Europe (ensure **geographical balance**)
- The goal is to create some **20 European Universities by 2024**

- Mobility shall become the rule not the exception in the EUN, e.g. **mobility “for all”**
- EUN should cooperate in the areas of **education, research** and **innovation** and develop **innovative concepts**, including the usage of digital formats
- EUN should offer **joint study programmes**
- EUN shall promote **multilingualism** / allow for learning in different languages
- EUN shall promote **European values and cohesion**

The Workshop seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion and may discuss the following questions:

- How can EUN contribute to strengthening European integration and support European values?
- What do we understand by the mandate of the European Council to "increase the international competitiveness" through EUN? What is necessary to achieve this?
- How can we ensure a geographical balance of EUN in Europe?
- What do we understand by reaching the “next level of cooperation” / more integration than existing networks?
- Which conditions need to be put in place to achieve key objectives of the EUNs, such as “mobility for all” and “development of fully integrated study programmes”?
- Setting-up EUN requires a long-term approach. How can we ensure the sustainability of the EUN?
- What key principles (e.g. selection criteria) are necessary to set-up a successful, fair and transparent selection process?