

Symposium



The future of the EUI: The relevance of the European University Alliances for the Swiss higher education landscape

22-23 October 2026

Rue du Trône 98,
1050 Brussels, Belgium

Event Summary

The European Universities Initiative has promised to transform the European higher education landscape through an ambitious vision for institutional cooperation. As the new programmes for research and education are taking shape, 2026 provides an important opportunity to assess the benefits and challenges of university alliances, specifically for the Swiss context.

This two-day symposium is jointly organised by the Swiss Global Competence Lab (SGCL) and SwissCore, with the support of UAS4EUROPE and Universities of Applied Science Denmark. It brings together Swiss representatives of higher education institutions involved in the European University alliances or considering involvement in an alliance.

The symposium offers a space for open and critical reflection on definitions of success and the added value of the alliance model for Swiss higher education institutions.

During different thematic sessions, participants will examine both current practices and future expectations for how alliances can serve the distinct needs of Swiss institutions, especially in light of evolving EU programmes, Switzerland's anticipated association to Erasmus+ and in the current geopolitical landscape.

A joint pre-workshop for universities of applied sciences will further offer an opportunity to compare and discuss Swiss and international experiences, as well as to present key messages to invited decision-makers in charge of the future of the initiative. Some of the key questions posed during thematic sessions include:

- What scientific evidence exists concerning the impact of university alliances?
- What is the political relevance of university alliances for Swiss institutions?
- What does it mean for an alliance to be successful, and how can this be measured?
- What are the strategic reasons for Swiss higher education institutions to engage in the European Universities Initiative, and what benefits does the Initiative provide beyond those of existing international collaboration frameworks?

Symposium Agenda, 22.10.2026

09:00 – 13:00

Pre-Workshop for Universities of Applied Sciences
(see separate [programme](#))

13:30 – 15:00

Keynote input on the topic: What are the key scientific findings on university alliances?

Content

Institutionally formalised alliances between universities are not a novel phenomenon; such collaborations have existed for several decades. What is unprecedented, however, is the establishment by the European Union of a comprehensive policy framework for university alliances, namely the European University Initiative (EUI). Within this framework, alliances are envisaged not merely as voluntary partnerships but as strategic instruments for advancing specific European policy objectives.

Owing to this high-level political embedding, the EUI has attracted considerable scholarly attention. After six years of implementation, it is pertinent to assess its principal outcomes. Ultimately, these considerations are essential for determining whether continued engagement in the Initiative is both beneficial and strategically justified.

Guiding Questions

- How are alliances managing tensions between strategic European integration, national and institutional autonomy, and legitimacy towards stakeholders?
- How are initial configurations reflecting both European policy ambitions and institutional path dependencies?
- How does the longer trajectory of European higher education integration look like, and how is the EUI contributing to this process?

Speakers

Bjørn Stensaker, Professor, University of Oslo

Format

Input presentation and discussion

Symposium Agenda, 22.10.2026

15:30 – 17:00

To what extent do alliances reflect broader European integration agendas, and how do institutions position themselves within these dynamics?

Content

European University Alliances are not just academic collaborations; they form part of the wider political project of European integration. Switzerland participates in this initiative despite not being an EU member or having full programme association of the Erasmus+ funding scheme. The strong engagement of Swiss higher education institutions thus raises questions about the strategic and political agenda of these institutions.

This workshop will examine the political, strategic and institutional implications of this situation. It asks whether alliances primarily function as instruments of European integration, competitive positioning or institutional branding, and what benefit there actually is for the Swiss higher education system and its stakeholders.

Guiding Questions

- What does the tension between European integration and national authority over the education sector mean for the engagement in alliances?
- Is there an instrumentalisation of the higher education sector regarding European integration?
- Which strategies are used by higher education institutions to manage these tensions?

Speakers

Marina Cino Pagliarello, Research Fellow, European University Institute

Anna-Katharina Lautenschütz, Enhance Alliance, ETH Zürich

Juan Ramón Real, PIONEER Office coordinator and doctoral researcher in Public Law, University of Huelva

Format

Panel discussion followed by breakout sessions and plenary synthesis

Symposium Agenda, 23.10.2026

From 09:00

Welcome coffee

09:30 – 11:30

Success of Alliances: Which Alliances will survive the next ten to fifteen years and why?

Content

According to the European Commission's 2025 report and data tool, alliances are now mobilising tens of thousands of students annually: intra-alliance student mobility increased by almost 450% within the first three years, with more than 55,000 students participating in 2022–23.

These figures point to rapid growth, experimentation and institutional engagement across Europe. Yet they also raise a more fundamental question: does this reflect the success of alliances? What about research initiatives, stakeholder engagement and joint programmes at all levels?

This workshop takes the Commission's report as a starting point and invites participants to explore success and sustainability of alliances from different perspectives.

Guiding Questions

- How do WE define the success of our alliances and how is the EU defining the success of alliances?
- How can we measure the success of alliances?

From the perspective of the EU commission and the Member States:

- Which alliances do they want to still be in operation 15 years from now?
- What might exist in 2035 that doesn't exist today?
- What would disappear if alliances ended tomorrow?
- What must alliances uniquely deliver to justify their existence?
- How do higher education institutions outside the EU navigate European cooperation and strategic partnerships in the absence of full programme integration?

Symposium Agenda, 23.10.2026

Speakers Peter van der Hijden, Independent Higher Education Strategy Advisor
Stefan Zotti, Deputy Head of Unit Higher Education, DG EAC, European Commission (*tbc*)
Mette Katrine Oftebro, Circle U. Alliance, University of Oslo

Format Expert input, World Café, plenary synthesis

11:30 – 13:00 Lunch break

13:00 – 14:30 **European Universities Alliances: Strategic Reflections and Institutional Takeaways**

Content Wrap-up of the different sessions

Guiding Questions What have we learnt and what are our key takeaways for our own alliance participation?

Format Small group workshops in each alliance team, plenary session and key messages for management of each institution
