FORUM OF
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
ALLIANCES WROCLAW

12 - 13 JUNE 2025

SUMMARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the organizers of the 3rd Forum of the European Universities Alliances, which took place on June 12-13 in Wrocław, we would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all the distinguished guests who honored us with their presence.

We are deeply grateful for your commitment and contribution to this unique event, organized under the auspices of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Your presence - esteemed Ministers, Representatives of the European Commission, Rectors, Presidents, and leaders from the European world of academia and politics - lent the highest prestige to our Forum and contributed to its substantive success.

We firmly believe that the intensive discussions, inspiring debates, and the exchange of valuable experiences that took place within the historic walls of the University of Wrocław will become a cornerstone for further strengthening cooperation within the European Higher Education Area. Your active participation in the panels and thematic sessions was an essential contribution to building strong and innovative universities of the future, capable of meeting the challenges of the modern world.

We hope that the time spent in Wrocław was not only professionally fruitful for you but also provided an opportunity to establish new and strengthen existing relationships. It is thanks to your openness to dialogue and shared commitment that the 3rd Forum of the European Universities Alliances proved to be a true celebration of the European academic community.

Once again, we thank you for accepting our invitation and look forward to further fruitful collaboration.

Please find attached the summary and conclusions of the session talks, which we are pleased to share with you as a continuation of the dialogue initiated during the Forum.

With utmost respect,

Vice-Rector for Internationalisation Patrycja Matusz, and the organisation team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The impact of European Universities alliances and best practices in tackling shared challenges

The Forum of the European University Alliances convened with a powerful and unified message: the initiative is a resounding success and a cornerstone of Europe's future, but it has reached a critical juncture. Having moved beyond its pilot phase, the alliances are now a transformative force in higher education, driving unprecedented international cooperation, innovation, and the strengthening of European values.

The core message from all speakers - including government ministers, European Commission officials, and university leaders - was that these alliances are not just academic projects but vital geopolitical instruments for building a more unified, competitive, and resilient Europe. However, to fulfill this immense potential, the initiative now faces significant challenges that require urgent attention: ensuring long-term sustainable funding, overcoming regulatory barriers at the national level, and fostering a deeper, systemic integration that goes beyond a small group of enthusiasts. The most impassioned plea was for trust - a call for policymakers to grant the alliances the flexibility and autonomy needed to innovate and deliver on their ambitious vision.

Key Themes and Messages

1. Acknowledgment of Unprecedented Success and Impact

Across the board, speakers celebrated the tangible achievements of the initiative.

- **Scale and Scope:** The initiative has grown to 65 alliances, uniting nearly 750 higher education institutions and over 11 million students. This scale alone represents a monumental shift in European higher education.

- **Tangible Outcomes:** Concrete successes include the creation of over 600 joint study programs, innovative curricula tackling modern

challenges like the green and digital transitions, improved student mobility, and the development of shared governance models.

- **The European Degree:** A major milestone highlighted was the political agreement on a Council Resolution for a European Degree, a direct result of the alliances' pioneering work. This is seen as a steppingstone toward a fully-fledged, recognized European diploma.

2. The Geopolitical and Values-Based Importance

A central theme was that the alliances' mission extends far beyond the campus.

- **A Bulwark for European Values:** In an era of geopolitical instability, rising anti-EU sentiment, and threats to academic freedom, the alliances are positioned as a „counterforce." They actively promote and defend core European values like democracy, solidarity, and critical thinking.

- **Strengthening European Unity:** Speakers repeatedly emphasized that by connecting universities, researchers, and students across borders, the alliances are helping to build a „braver and stronger Europe." They are seen as essential tools for fostering a shared European identity and ensuring the continent's stability.

- **Global Competitiveness:** The initiative is framed as a strategic response to global talent competition. By pooling resources and fostering excellence, the alliances aim to make Europe the world's most attractive destination for learning, research, and innovation.

3. The Critical Challenges Ahead

While celebrating success, the discussion was grounded in a frank assessment of the hurdles that must be overcome to move „further and faster."

- **Sustainability and Funding:** This was the most cited challenge. The current project-based funding model is seen as unsustainable. Panelists called for predictable, long-term financial structures that would allow for strategic planning and reduce the immense administrative burden, which currently stifles innovation.

- **Regulatory Barriers and Member State Engagement:** Alliances face significant obstacles from incompatible national regulations regarding quality assurance, joint program accreditation, and employment structures. There was a strong call for Member States to provide more flexibility in their legal frameworks to enable the deep cooperation the alliances are designed for.

- **Mindset Shift and Deep Integration:** A key challenge is moving from thinking in terms of individual institutions to embracing a true „alliance-first" perspective. This requires a cultural shift to embed the alliance's mission into the core strategy of each member university and engage the entire academic community - not just a dedicated few.

- **Avoiding a Two-Tier System:** There is a significant risk that the initiative could create a divide between well-funded alliance members and other institutions. Speakers stressed the responsibility of alliances to act as „role models" and „pathfinders," sharing their successes, failures, and best practices to benefit the entire European Higher Education Area.

4. The Overarching Plea: Trust and Autonomy

The most powerful and resonant message, particularly from the audience, was a plea for trust.

- **From Project to Vision:** Speakers argued that the alliances should no longer be treated as experimental projects subject to constant evaluation. They are a long-term strategic vision.

- **Freedom to Innovate (and Fail):** To be true „sandboxes" for innovation, alliances need the autonomy and flexibility to try new things without the fear of immediate failure. The constant pressure of reporting and applying for funds consumes resources that should be dedicated to implementation and co-creation.

- **A New Relationship:** The call was for a new, more mature relationship with funders and policymakers, one built on the trust that has been earned through the initiative's success. The European Commission responded positively, affirming its strong political support and trust in the alliances' potential.

Conclusion

The forum painted a picture of an initiative at a triumphant but pivotal moment. The European University Alliances have proven their concept and are already delivering transformative results. The message is clear: the „why" is no longer in question. The focus has now shifted to the „how." The future success and systemic impact of this „crown jewel of European education" will depend on whether the political enthusiasm can be translated into the practical support structures it needs sustainable funding, flexible regulations, and the trust required to truly reshape the future of higher education in Europe and for the world.

The main conclusions from the session are:

- **The initiative is at a pivotal moment:** The European University Alliances have successfully proven their value and are now seen as a transformative force in higher education.

- **The focus has shifted from „why" to „how":** The debate is no longer about whether the initiative is a good idea, but about how to best implement its next phase and overcome practical hurdles.

- **Future success depends on tangible support:** For the alliances to reach their full potential, they need three key things:

  1) Sustainable, long-term funding instead of project-based models.

  2) Flexible national regulations to allow for deeper cross-border cooperation.

  3) Trust from policymakers to give them the autonomy to innovate.

- **A „Crown Jewel":** The ultimate conclusion is that this initiative has the potential to become the „crown jewel of European education," but its success hinges on providing these necessary support structures.
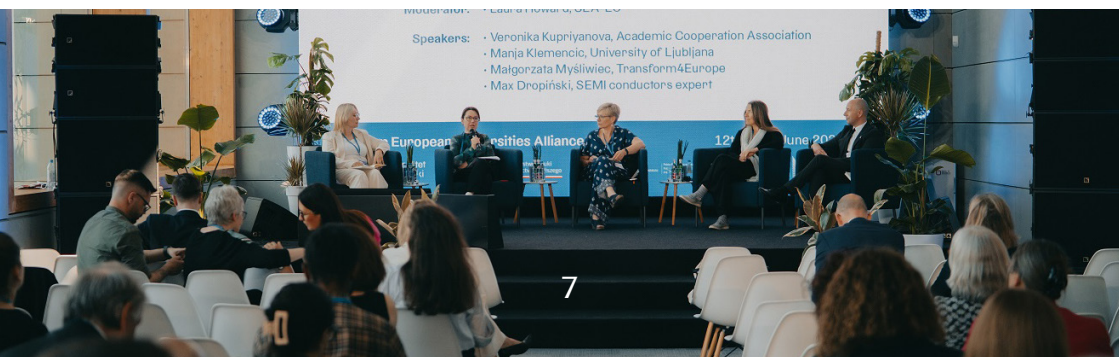
SESSION 2

Union of Skills Initiative: Key priorities for European Universities Alliances in shaping the future competitiveness of the EU

The session addressed the strategic alignment between the Union of Skills initiative and the ongoing development of European University Alliances. It explored how this relationship can contribute to enhancing Europe's competitiveness through improved educational ecosystems, better governance, integration of skills across borders, and deeper collaboration between academia and the labor market.

1. The Strategic Role of Alliances in Building a Union of Skills

Key Points

- European University Alliances are no longer limited to temporary project frameworks; they are evolving into permanent ecosystems that integrate education, research, innovation, and civic engagement.

- Alliances serve as a natural platform for piloting and implementing the Union of Skills, due to their transnational structure and co-ownership models.

- They contribute to building a pan-European educational space that is not symbolic but functional - characterized by shared curricula, micro-credentials, joint governance models, and institutional integration.

Arguments

A fragmented policy and program environment has hindered long-term strategic alignment; the Union of Skills helps unify disparate tools (e.g., micro-credentials, Erasmus+, policy frameworks) into an integrated vision.

- Both the Union of Skills and the Alliances aim to foster cross-border collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness to labor market needs. Thus, they are mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion

The Union of Skills needs the Alliances to deliver on its goals, but the Alliances also need the Union of Skills to elevate their initiatives to the European policy level, enabling structural transformation and broader impact.

2. Governance, Funding, and Policy Coordination

Key Points

- High-level policy alignment is necessary to shift from isolated institutional efforts to a coherent European education system.
- New governance mechanisms should include cross-sectoral cooperation between education institutions, governments, industry, and civil society.

Arguments

- Education takes time, yet societal transformation - driven by digitalization, AI, and climate change - is advancing rapidly. Urgent investment in education and skills is required.
- There is a widespread disconnect between institutional ambition and actual buy-in at all levels of the university and government structures.
- Alliances must be empowered to initiate reform, not only within academia but across national policy frameworks, to support lifelong learning and employability.

Conclusion

The governance model underpinning the Union of Skills must facilitate flexible coordination and shared responsibility among stakeholders. Alliances play a central role in accelerating reforms, but national systems must also adapt.

3. European Degree and Transnational Programmes

Key Points

- There is strong support for the development of a fully-fledged Euro-

pean Degree - not merely a label - delivered through joint, integrated programs.

- Current joint and multiple degrees are complex and resource-intensive; merely adding a European label is seen as insufficient.

Arguments

- A European Degree should be accessible to the broadest possible cohort of students, not just elite programs or Erasmus participants.
- Recognition across Europe would ease labor mobility and strengthen the internal market for skills.
- Such a degree could change the mindset of graduates, reinforce their European identity and enhancing cross-border employment.

Conclusion

There is a clear call for ambition beyond symbolic gestures. A legally and administratively recognized European Degree can drive deeper integration and increase Europe's attractiveness to global learners and employers.

4. Lifelong Learning, Micro-Credentials, and Flexible Learning Pathways

Key Points

- A paradigm shift is underway - from linear, degree-focused education to flexible, modular, and learner-centric pathways.
- Micro-credentials offer a mechanism to serve both traditional students and lifelong learners through personalized, stackable learning formats.

Arguments

- Current micro-credential initiatives suffer from lack of recognition by employers and insufficient quality assurance frameworks.
- Universities must design credentials that are clearly linked to competencies, assessment, and labor market relevance.
- Faculty development, institutional support, and quality systems need

reconfiguration to support this model.

- Lifelong learning cannot be an afterthought; it must be embedded into the core mission of universities.

Conclusion

Micro-credentials and flexible pathways are essential for the future of learning and employment in Europe. However, systemic support, trust-building mechanisms, and alignment with employers are critical to their success.

5. Attracting and Retaining Talent in Europe

Key Points

- Europe is facing a global competition for talent, with countries like Singapore and Australia rapidly modernizing education systems and attracting skilled migrants.

- The EU's share of retained international students is low, highlighting the need to transform universities into anchors of talent and innovation, not just education providers.

Arguments

- Europe must transition from a degree-centric to a skills-centric model of education, where universities act as regional innovation engines.

- Employer co-creation, embedded placements, and clear career pathways must become standard elements of European education.

- Creating micro-regional clusters (e.g., Baltic AI hubs, Alpine sustainability centers) can link alliances more directly to labor markets and regional growth strategies.

Conclusion

To remain globally attractive, Europe must act with urgency. This requires not just stronger educational offerings, but also structural reforms that connect education with employment, immigration policy, and innovation ecosystems.

6. Integration Across European Initiatives

Key Points

- Concerns were raised about duplication of efforts across parallel EU initiatives, such as skills academies and university alliances.

- There is strong potential for synergies, particularly in thematic areas like AI, cybersecurity, and green transitions.

Arguments

- Skills academies (industry-led) and alliances (academia-led) must cooperate to avoid silos and maximize shared knowledge.

- Cross-initiative sharing of micro-credentials, resources, and curricular tools would enhance efficiency and impact.

Conclusion

Strategic coordination across EU instruments and funding programs is essential to maximize impact and reduce fragmentation.

Final Reflections and Takeaways

1) **Structural transformation is essential:** European education must become more agile, learner-driven, and industry-connected.

2) **European Degrees** and recognition systems need to go beyond pilot projects and reach institutional and national implementation.

3) **Lifelong learning and micro-credentials** are vital tools, but they require robust quality frameworks, employer validation, and clear pathways to full qualifications.

4) **Employers must be co-creators**, not just stakeholders. Their involvement ensures relevance, credibility, and broader adoption.

5) **Europe's competitiveness depends on its ability to act boldly.** Delays and incrementalism will not suffice in a rapidly evolving global skills race.

The future of European Universities Initiative – paving the way towards sustainable funding

This session addressed the critical issue of funding for European University Alliances, focusing on how to move from fragmented, project-based financing to a sustainable, long-term investment framework. Discussions emphasized the integration of all university missions - education, research, innovation, and societal service - into a holistic funding model that supports alliances structurally and strategically.

Key Points

- **Limitations of Current Funding**
    1) Erasmus+ remains the main source of funding, but excludes research and is constrained by short project cycles.
    2) Rigid structures and administrative burdens hinder adaptability and innovation.

- **Call for Long-Term and Multi-Source Financing**
    1) Alliances require access to a mix of funding from Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, regional and national sources, and private investments.
    2) Sustainable development needs predictability, stability, and flexibility.

- **Transition from Pilot to Structural Implementation**
    1) Alliances are moving beyond design to full integration and operationalization.
    2) Institutional commitment is strong, but administrative fragmentation remains a barrier.

- **Inclusiveness and Community Engagement**
    1) Effective implementation demands inclusion of students, faculty,

and staff.

2) Additional resources are needed to support broad-based partici-
   pation.

- **Research and Holistic Strategies**

    1) Research remains underfunded despite its central role in univer-
       sity missions.

    2) Alliances advocate for funding schemes that enable integration
       across all missions.

- **Diversity and Autonomy**

    1) One-size-fits-all approaches are inadequate due to the diversity of
       alliances.

    2) Future models should respect institutional autonomy while en-
       abling common European goals.

- **Concrete Proposals for Reform**

    1) Establish a single-entry point for accessing multiple EU and na-
       tional funding programs.

    2) Implement long-term funding frameworks (e.g. seven years).

    3) Maintain flexible administrative processes and quality assurance
       mechanisms.

    4) Encourage visibility and policy advocacy through strategic com-
       munication.

- **Role of National and EU Policymakers**

    1) The European Parliament is urged to protect and expand Eras-
       mus+ and related budgets.

    2) Future funding schemes must reflect the political priority of edu-
       cation and skills.

    3) Alliances should stay within Erasmus+ while also benefiting from
       complementary funding instruments.

Conclusion

The session concluded with strong consensus on the need for a systemic shift towards sustainable and holistic funding for European University Alliances. Stakeholders emphasized structural reforms, the inclusion of research, national and regional co-financing, and the critical role of political advocacy. The future success of the European Universities Initiative depends on long-term investment, institutional commitment, and the strategic integration of education, research, and innovation.

SESSION 4

Optimising impact with and for external stakeholder

Session 4 explored how European University Alliances can deepen their societal impact and competitiveness by building strong, strategic, and reciprocal relationships with external stakeholders. It focused on effective engagement models, the role of national agencies, collaborative mechanisms, and the need for diversity, scalability, and measurable impact.

Key Points

- **Stakeholders as Core Partners**

  1) External stakeholders are not peripheral but central to achieving systemic reform, societal impact, and strengthening European identity.

  2) Alliances work with over 2,200 associated partners, including NGOs, businesses, cities, and regional authorities.

- **Engagement Models and Strategies**

  1) Successful formats include dual lectures, collaborative seminars, and co-created study programs informed by stakeholder needs.

  2) Alliances must move from initiating to sustaining stakeholder engagement, ensuring long-term involvement and value creation.

- **Role of National Agencies**

  1) National agencies are strategic allies that offer support beyond funding, such as policy feedback, peer learning, and dissemination.

  2) Projects like „SPREAD the EUU" and Czech-led audits show how alliances contribute to national policy goals.

- **The Value of Diversity and Density in Partnerships**

  1) Effective collaboration relies on diverse stakeholder ecosystems, including businesses, NGOs, public authorities, and cultural sec-

16

tors.

2) Partnerships should be both broad (diverse) and deep (dense), spanning disciplines, programs, and institutional levels.

- **Strategic Perspective from Business**

    1) Alliances improve graduate readiness and strengthen Europe's long-term competitiveness by fostering collaboration.

    2) Employers value graduates who have experience in cross-border and interdisciplinary cooperation.

- **Legal and Structural Evolution**

    1) The shift toward legal entities within alliances encourages clearer roles, stronger partnerships, and shared investment in outcomes.

- **Scaling and Standardizing Micro-Credentials**

    1) Micro-credentials support flexible, modular, and responsive learning aligned with rapidly changing technological needs.

    2) Standardization and cross-institutional recognition are crucial for scalability and impact.

- **Measuring Impact Beyond Academia**

    1) Impact should be assessed through practical outputs: co-designed programs, internships, joint R&D, start-ups, and micro-credentials.

    2) Living labs and innovation ecosystems offer fertile ground for co-creation with stakeholders.

- **Inclusion of SMEs and Local Partners**

    1) Small and medium-sized enterprises are often overlooked, but can benefit greatly from upskilling partnerships.

    2) Alliances should broaden their stakeholder base to reflect regional needs and support local innovation.

- **Shared Responsibility for Impact**

    1) Stakeholder engagement must shift from transactional to co-owned: alliances and stakeholders co-create and co-deliver impact.

2) National agencies and funding bodies are key players in embedding and sustaining long-term support mechanisms.

Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement is not a formality, but a critical enabler of the European Universities Initiative's success. Alliances must recognize external stakeholders as co-architects of educational innovation, employability, and societal transformation. Sustainable collaboration depends on strategic alignment, diversified partnerships, scalable models, and shared responsibility for outcomes. The guiding message: ask not what your stakeholders can do for you – ask what you can do for your stakeholders.

SESSION 5.1

Research and innovation dimension

Session 5 featured a candid and thought-provoking discussion on the current state and future potential of research and innovation within European University Alliances. The panel examined five central questions, highlighting gaps, opportunities, and practical challenges in fostering cross-alliance research collaboration. While optimism prevailed, the conversation underscored that unlocking the full potential of research partnerships requires intention, strategic support, and a cultural shift within institutions.

Key Points

- **Status of Research Collaboration Within Alliances**
  1) Current research collaboration among alliance members is limited but growing.
  2) Empirical data (e.g. co-publication trends) shows a gradual increase in joint outputs, but the scale remains modest.
  3) Education has been the primary driver thus far; research is seen as the next strategic frontier.

- **Can Research Be Orchestrated Top-Down?**
  1) There is skepticism about managing research collaboration through top-down coordination.
  2) Established researchers often rely on pre-existing personal networks and are unlikely to shift to new partnerships without compelling reasons.
  3) Collaborative ecosystems may evolve organically, but need structured support.

- **Opportunity for Early-Career Researchers**
  1) Alliances offer a unique platform for junior and early-career researchers to build international networks and engage in collaborative research.

2) Mobility and exchange programs can foster interdisciplinary cooperation among emerging scholars.

- **Role of Funding and Infrastructure Sharing**

    1) There is no consensus on creating a separate funding stream for alliance-based research.

    2) However, shared infrastructure (labs, data platforms, equipment) could be supported through dedicated mechanisms.

    3) Excessive duplication of infrastructure was flagged as inefficient; shared use across institutions is encouraged.

- **Internal Prioritization and Research Culture Building**

    1) Instead of institutional prioritization, alliances could leverage human capital across institutions to strengthen research capacity.

    2) Suggestions included involving researchers from other alliance members in PhD committees, internal evaluations, and mentoring schemes.

    3) Such exchange would be especially valuable for widening countries seeking to enhance their research culture.

Conclusion

The session concluded on a positive note, acknowledging the untapped potential of research collaboration within European University Alliances. Progress is gradual, but there is a clear opportunity - particularly for early-career researchers and for strengthening institutional research cultures across borders. Success will depend on proactively engaging with opportunities, overcoming inertia, and harnessing the collective capacity of the alliances. The path forward is promising for those willing to act.

SESSION 5.2

Students in the centre of EUI

This parallel session explored the multifaceted role of students within European University Alliances, focusing on three key dimensions: student engagement, student representation, and students as co-creators. The discussion featured insights from representatives of the European Students' Union (ESU), the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), and students who have participated in alliance-based programs. The session reinforced the foundational principle that students must remain at the heart of the European Universities Initiative.

Key Points

- Students as the Core Purpose

  1) The session emphasized that alliances must never lose sight of their ultimate beneficiaries: the students.

  2) Reference was made to the aspiration of providing a „100% international experience" to all students, not just the mobile few.

- Diverse Perspectives and Real Experiences

  1) The panel included both student organizations and individual students with direct alliance experience from CHARM-EU and EU-CONEXUS.

2) Their testimonies brought practical insights into the opportunities and challenges of being an alliance student.

- Engagement Spaces Must Be Created

    1) A central message was the importance of consistently creating spaces for student engagement, even if they are not always used.

    2) Student participation naturally fluctuates due to generational and cultural shifts; however, the infrastructure for participation must be stable and supportive.

- Representation and Co-Creation

    1) Students wish to be recognized not only as participants but as co-creators of the alliance.

    2) Active roles in governance, decision-making, and the design of educational initiatives are essential to fostering true inclusion.

- Support Structures Are Essential

    1) Students need time, resources, and institutional support to meaningfully engage.

    2) Alliances must bridge cultural differences in student engagement and adapt leadership practices to be more inclusive.

- Sustainable Funding for Opportunities

    1) A strong call was made to defend and expand Erasmus+ funding in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

    2) Even maintaining current funding levels may result in diminished support due to inflation and increased program scope.

Conclusion

The session concluded with a unified message: students must remain at the centre of the European Universities Initiative - not just in rhetoric, but in structural design and practice. Their roles as engaged participants, legitimate representatives, and valued co-creators must be actively supported. Alliances should embed flexible yet consistent mechanisms that ensure student inclusion across generations and cultural contexts. The future of the initiative depends not only on policy and funding, but on how well it empowers those it was created for.

SESSION 5.3

From European University to European Degree

This session explored the evolution of the European Universities Initiative and the ongoing efforts toward establishing a joint European Degree. Moderated by Katarzyna Aleksy, the discussion brought together representatives from national agencies, universities, and student organizations from the most actively engaged countries - France, Spain, Germany, and Poland. The session addressed sustained national commitment, student engagement, and the opportunities and challenges posed by the European Degree concept.

Key Points

- **Strong National Momentum**
    1) France, Spain, and Germany reported continued and even growing enthusiasm for the initiative.
    2) France noted a doubling of institutional participation in the 2024 alliance call and strong ministerial support, with recurring national conferences and active collaboration with other countries.
    3) Spain emphasized widespread institutional participation and swift regulatory adaptation to support joint degrees, including a new diploma format bearing alliance logos.
    4) Germany highlighted a multi-level commitment: national, regional, and institutional. All 16 regions now have at least one participating university.

- **University-Level Engagement and Sustainability**
    1) Long-term commitment from alliances like EUNICE was attributed to joint programme development and the creation of legal entities to embed the initiative in core university functions.

- **Student Awareness: A Critical Gap**
    1) According to ESN, student awareness of the alliances is critically

low - only 17% in the latest survey, compared to 95% awareness for Erasmus+ study mobility studies.

2) Students stressed the need for modern, relatable communication strategies, including peer-to-peer outreach, TikTok, and micro-credentials to incentivize engagement.

- **European Degree: Opportunities and Concerns**

  1) Pilot projects and the blueprint offer structured, practical pathways forward. Spain is a strong contributor, coordinating three of the six pilot projects.

  2) Germany expressed reservations about the blueprint's complexity and lack of integration with Bologna tools.

  3) Student representatives voiced concerns that the European Degree might become another elite initiative, inaccessible to the broader student population.

  4) Some stakeholders argued the model is outdated and called for greater use of flexible tools like micro-credentials and better implementation of existing frameworks like the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

- **Council Resolution (May 2024)**

  1) The Council resolution under the Polish presidency was widely welcomed for establishing a clear, phased roadmap toward 2029.

  2) German representatives supported the gradual, experience-based implementation approach.

Conclusion

The session concluded with a recognition that while political and institutional support for European Universities remains high, the path to a European Degree is complex and multifaceted. Enhanced communication, student inclusion, regulatory alignment, and a balanced approach to innovation and flexibility are critical to success. The Council resolution provides needed political direction, but practical and cultural challenges remain. Alliances must continue to act as bridges between institutional ambition and student needs.

SESSION 6

EUI as role model for systemic transformation

This session explored how European University Alliances are transitioning from time-bound projects into long-term drivers of structural reform in higher education. Panelists highlighted how alliances are acting as role models and gamechangers, setting examples in governance, education innovation, student engagement, societal collaboration, and international partnerships. They also addressed the persistent challenges that must be overcome for alliances to fulfill their transformational potential.

Key Points

- **Framing Alliances as Role Models**
    1) The session was introduced with a metaphor comparing the first generations of alliances to „elder siblings" who are navigating uncharted territory to help „younger siblings" benefit from their experiences.
    2) This inter-generational learning fosters greater efficiency and accelerates progress across the initiative.
- **Innovative Practices Driving Systemic Change**
    1) Legal and Structural Development:
        a) Some alliances are forming legal entities or structured governance models to ensure long-term stability and autonomy.
        b) Others are building capacity for international partnerships beyond Europe.
    2) Societal Engagement:
        a) Alliances are setting up urban-focused centers and collaborative frameworks to include diverse local and regional stakeholders.
        b) Challenge-based learning formats are being used to link student education with real-world issues and civic needs.

3) Educational Innovation:

    a) Examples included joint bachelor's programs, interdisciplinary doctoral schools, and reimagined frameworks for professional qualifications.

    b) Some alliances are developing internal recognition mechanisms and pilot frameworks to drive change nationally.

4) Student Involvement:

    a) Students are engaged through voting mechanisms, assemblies, and participation in governance structures.

    b) Student boards play an active role in shaping alliance priorities and decision-making processes.

- **Value-Driven and Inclusive Approaches**
    1) Several alliances are integrating academic values and social responsibility into their strategies.
    2) Inclusion frameworks and health and well-being initiatives have been launched to promote an inclusive alliance culture.

- **Building Global Bridges**
    1) Global partnerships are increasingly seen as essential, with alliances forming networks spanning multiple continents.
    2) Even where national frameworks are lacking, alliances are innovating in areas such as micro-credentials and international collaboration.

- **The Role of National Agencies and Long-Term Vision**
    1) National agencies emphasized the need for predictable and multi-year funding, encouraging governments to recognize alliances as structural, not project-based.
    2) Some countries have launched dedicated funding programs to support alliance participation and extend solidarity, including support for displaced students and scholars.
    3) Cross-ministerial initiatives and national-level coordination projects are underway to explore how alliances can evolve sustainably and independently.

- **Vision for the Next Decade**
  1) An audience poll highlighted shifting long-term priorities, with a clear focus on:
     a) Attracting international talent to Europe.
     b) Fostering research and innovation capacity.
     c) Strengthening collaboration with regional ecosystems.
- **Acknowledging the Systemic Gap**
  1) A notable observation from the floor was the disconnect between alliance-level commitment and institutional-level reluctance to embrace full systemic transformation.
  2) Continuous advocacy is needed within universities and among national policymakers to convert enthusiasm into structural adoption.

Conclusion

The session concluded with a strong call for alliances to continue positioning themselves as long-term role models, not just for innovation, but for sustainable and inclusive transformation. To succeed, they need stable funding, enabling governance frameworks, and deeper engagement with communities beyond academia. Alliances should pursue change through a deliberate, step-by-step process, cultivating trust and institutional buy-in along the way.

In closing, the moderator offered a metaphor drawn from folklore: like the mythical elves in the shoemaker's workshop, alliances bring the creativity and determination to transform higher education from mere survival to excellence. But to make the magic happen, they must be given the time, tools, and support to complete the task - with the whole community, national agencies, and EU institutions working hand in hand.