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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
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Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education
	- Revised Presidency text- finalization

Delegations will find attached the revised Presidency text on the above mentioned subject with a view to finalize the text at the informal videoconference of the members of the Education Committee on 20-21 April 2021.

Bold and **[…]** are used to indicate changes to the previous version (7344/21).

Draft Council conclusions on European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in the Annex to these conclusions,

HIGHLIGHTING THAT:

1. the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 called on the Member States, the Council and the European Commission to take work forward on strengthening strategic partnerships between higher education institutions across the EU and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting of bottom-up networks of higher education institutions 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,

2. in its conclusions of 28 June 2018, the European Council called for cooperation between research, innovation and education to be encouraged, including through the European Universities initiative,

3. the Council Conclusions of 22 May 2018 on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (EEA) further acknowledged the flagship role that the 'European Universities' could play in the creation of a EEA as a whole,

4.   the Council Resolution of 8 November 2019 on further developing the EEA to support future-oriented education and training systems endorsed the further development of the European Universities initiative considering that this could be a game-changing step forward in cross-institutional cooperation by offering various inspirational visions, models and themes for interaction to support the future development of the EEA in accordance with the changing needs of society,

5.   in the first ever joint policy debate held on 8 November 2019, Ministers of finance and education stressed the need to step up effective and efficient investment in education and training, skills and competences, in terms of quality, quantity, inclusiveness and equity[1],

6.   the Council Resolution of 27 February 2020 on education and training in the European Semester further acknowledged investment in education and training as the most powerful investment that can be made in people and in the future and its social and economic returns for individuals, employers and society as a whole,

7.   in the European Skills Agenda, adopted by the Commission on 30 June 2020, 'European Universities' are foreseen as setting standards for the transformation of higher education institutions across the EEA and the European Research Area (ERA), also making lifelong learning and talent circulation a reality. This will be achieved, in particular, within the full roll-out of the European Universities initiative under the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and Horizon Europe, as well as the development of a European Competence Framework for researchers.

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[1]   As highlighted in the Council Resolution on education and training in the European Semester: ensuring informed debates on reforms and investments, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32020G0227(01)

8.   in the Council conclusions of 1 December 2020 on the New ERA, the Council stressed the need for stronger synergies and interconnections between the ERA and the higher education related elements of the EEA, and identified institutional transformations, research careers, science education, training, international cooperation and knowledge circulation as possible areas of more determined cooperation, as well as supported the further development of the European university alliances as a flagship example for modern and inclusive higher education institutions of the future in Europe,

9.   in the Rome Communiqué 2020 adopted on 19 November 2020 at the Ministerial conference of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Ministers responsible for higher education stated that the alliances formed under the European Universities initiative constitute one important way of exploring deeper, larger-scale systemic cooperation, which can prove helpful for detecting and overcoming the obstacles to closer transnational cooperation by higher education institutions in the future,

10. the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the EEA and beyond (2021-2030) established as its fourth strategic priority the reinforcement of European higher education, acknowledging that over the next decade, higher education institutions will be encouraged to find new forms of deeper cooperation, namely by creating transnational alliances, including through the full roll-out of the European Universities initiative.

11. PLACEHOLDER: in its Conclusions of xx May 2021 on "The European Research Area: Deepening the ERA providing researchers with attractive and sustainable research careers and working conditions":

AWARE THAT:

12. Higher education policies are decided at the level of the individual Member States, at national or regional level, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle.

13. Higher education institutions are autonomous. Academic and scientific freedom is a central principle for their mission and activities.[2]

14. European higher education institutions are rich in diversity in terms of their history, organisational structures, fields of study and the regions in which they are located and to which they are connected.

15. 'European Universities' are still in **[…]**their early stages and more evaluation and evidence-based information is needed on the selected 41 pilots and their outcomes to support coherent and forward-looking policies.

16. 'European Universities' are open to partners from all types of higher education institutions, linking academic and non-academic partners and the labour market, while generally covering diverse cooperation with a broad geographic scope across Europe.

17. 'European Universities' will contribute decisively towards achieving the ambitious vision of an innovative, globally competitive and attractive EEA and ERA, in full synergy with the EHEA, by helping to boost the excellence dimension of higher education, research and innovation, while promoting gender equality**,** inclusiveness, and equity, allowing for seamless and ambitious transnational cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe, and inspiring the transformation of higher education.

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2   As underlined in the Statement of Academic Freedom annexed to the Rome Communiqué adopted on 19 November 2020 at the Ministerial conference of the European Higher Education Area, as well as in the Bonn declaration of 20 October 2020.

18. 'European Universities' have the potential to be instrumental in adapting education, training and research for the digital age, in line with the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), the EEA and the ERA, by developing European inter-university campuses. This initiative will boost synergies between higher education and research, by implementing innovative models of digital learning and teaching, through Open Science, Open Education and Open Data practices[3],

NOTES THAT:

19. After two Erasmus+ calls for proposals, complemented by Horizon 2020 support, 41 'European Universities' pilot alliances involving more than 280 higher education institutions, covering 5% of all higher education institutions across Europe, are now working towards their shared vision and institutional change, aiming at a structural, systemic and sustainable impact on education and training, research and innovation, and **[…]service** to society.

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[3] Open Science is a system change allowing for better science through open and collaborative ways of producing and sharing knowledge and data, as early as possible in the research process, and for communicating and sharing results
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/knowledge_publications_tools_and_data/documents/ec_rtd_factsheet-open-science_2019.pdf
Open education is a way of carrying out education, often using digital technologies. Its aim is to widen access and participation to everyone by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customisable for all. It offers multiple ways of teaching and learning, building and sharing knowledge. It also provides a variety of access routes to formal and non-formal education, and connects (Opening up Education: A Support Framework for Higher Education Institutions, 2016).
Open data as a concept is generally understood to denote data in an open format that can be freely used, re-used and shared by anyone for any purpose. (Directive (EU) 2019/1024 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on open data and the re-use of public sector information).

20. The first two calls strived for the right balance between quality and excellence, on the one hand, and inclusive and equitable geographical coverage on the other, supporting innovative education, knowledge transfer, research and innovation in order to achieve the initiative's goals, such as European cohesion and competitiveness, and at the same time promoting European values and the strengthening of the European identity.

21. Higher education institutions have proved to be resilient in managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has also revealed weaknesses regarding equitable access and support for students, staff, and researchers, in particular those with fewer opportunities and lower digital competences, as well as mobile early career researchers. A survey[4] showed that members of the first 17 'European Universities' perceived that being in an alliance helped them to navigate the crisis and is likely to allow them to recover faster by pooling their resources and strengths together.

22. European labour markets are transforming rapidly, due to technological development, digital and green transitions, and the restructuring of the economy, but also influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Flexible learning opportunities and formats are needed at all stages of life and across disciplines and sectors. This represents an opportunity for higher education institutions to develop innovative curricula, study programmes as well as flexible learning provisions and alternative learning pathways, to enhance quality, inclusion, and gender equality in higher education, as well as to develop education and research agendas responsive to **the** digital and green transition and key socio-economic challenges, while remaining committed to excellence.

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[4] European Universities Initiative Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on European Universities. Available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/coronavirus-european-universities-initiative-impact-survey-results_en

23. 'European Universities' **[…]have the potential to nurture** entrepreneurship and transversal skills and fuel innovation through a flow of creative talents to support the establishment and scaling up of start-ups and SMEs in Europe, notably by setting up and reinforcing technology transfer, or sharing knowledge and technology transfer capacity, thus potentially supporting the development of emerging novel concepts likely to lead to breakthroughs or market-creative innovations.

24. 'European Universities' are developing challenge-based approaches for shared education, research, and innovation to enhance interdisciplinary critical mass; they are sharing capacity and pooling resources, strengthening the attractiveness of academic and research careers, supporting institutional change, **[…]for example,** through inclusive gender equality plans, and reinforcing co-operation with surrounding ecosystem actors; they are working towards open science and open education, engaging with citizens for solving societal challenges and reinforcing excellence in education and research for global competitiveness.

WELCOMES:

25. The fact that **many members of** the European higher education community and **many of** its stakeholders have responded positively to the initiative and thereby have enabled the progress already made.

26. The full roll-out of the European Universities initiative under the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and Horizon Europe and the envisaged synergies with other programmes, as part of developing new joint and integrated long-term sustainable strategies on education and training, research**[…]**, innovation **and service to society**, strengthening the knowledge square[5].

27. The European Universities initiative strives for enhanced quality and ambitious level of extended cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe, while exploiting synergies with, for example, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, the **[…]Cooperation** Partnerships and **[...]**Alliances **for Innovation** of the Erasmus+ Programme, the Knowledge and Innovation Communities of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (KICs-EIT), the European Innovation Council (EIC), the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) of Horizon Europe or the strategic partnerships within national, regional and European programmes, and other existing successful cooperation models.

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[5] Concept understood as a junction of four core domains: education, research, innovation, and service to society - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&rid=4

ACKNOWLEDGES THAT:

28. The European Universities initiative aims to contribute to a more united, innovative, digital, connected and green Europe, open to the wider world by increasing the resilience, excellence, geographical and social inclusiveness, gender equality, attractiveness, and international competitiveness of European higher education institutions.

29. 'European Universities' aim to contribute to the quality of transnational cooperation through interinstitutional strategies that combine learning and teaching, research, innovation and knowledge transfer into the economy and the society, and contribute to policy and societal change.

30. 'European Universities' can be important accelerators for transforming and innovating learning and teaching methods. They are also important platforms for further developing the research and innovation dimensions within higher education institutions that need to pursue research-based learning, as well as long-term flexible and attractive research and teaching careers.

31. In line with the vision for a EEA and its achievement by 2025, the ERA, and taking into consideration the Rome ministerial communiqué, the 'European Universities' should - with full **respect for Member States' competences and with** regard to the principle of subsidiarity, institutional autonomy, academic freedom and in accordance with national and regional circumstances**, closely cooperating with the higher education authorities of Member States** - be guided to:

a) Promote a common European vision, including fundamental academic values contributing to a strengthened European identity for all learners, teachers, researchers and staff, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to drive the transformation towards a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive Europe, to cooperate and co-create knowledge within different European and global cultures, in different languages, across borders, sectors and academic disciplines.

b) Establish European inter-university campuses, based on inclusion, **equity,** gender equality and excellence in learning, teaching, research and innovation, covering a broad geographic scope across all parts of Europe.

c) Contribute to shared, integrated long-term education and training, research and innovation strategies, as well as service to society, in order to boost the quality, attractiveness, competitiveness and relevance of European higher education institutions and to strengthen the knowledge square. Higher education institutions pool together online and physical resources, courses, expertise, staff, data and infrastructure to leverage their strengths and become more resilient.

d) Explore new and attractive ways for the recruitment, reward**[…]**, assessment **[…]and** professionalization of **teachers,** staff **and** researchers**[…]**, working towards a better recognition and balance between educational, research, managerial and entrepreneurial achievements thus fostering best practices for recruitment and career development, while respecting the work-life balance, and developing a renewed appreciation and valuation of performance.

e) Establish ever stronger alliances by **[…]exploring** the feasibility of joint enrolment of students and joint recruitment of academics and researchers, **within the different national systems,** to make their education and research careers more attractive, sustainable, and flexible within the alliances.

f) Address societal challenges and skills needs in Europe by working in partnership and building European knowledge-creating, transdisciplinary and transnational teams of students and academics, together with researchers, and those from the business, innovation and wider communities. In cooperation with their surrounding innovation ecosystems, higher education institutions prepare students, graduates and early career researchers **to maximise their employability and** to take the opportunities offered and become agents of change for the twin green and digital transformations, as well as widen and strengthen the doctoral and postdoctoral training programmes beyond academic training to include transversal skills valuable to other sectors**, where appropriate.**

g) Move towards mainstreaming education for sustainable development across all levels and disciplines, driven by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting a STEAM[6] approach and making STEM fields and academic and research careers more attractive, including to women.

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[6] STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.
The STEAM approach for learning and teaching links STEM and other fields of study. It promotes transversal skills such as digital competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, management and entrepreneurial skills as well as cooperation with non-academic partners and responds to economic, environmental, political and social challenges. STEAM encourages the blending of knowledge that is required in the real world and natural curiosity. Definition by the Peer Learning Activity on STEAM education, Vienna, March 2020 (https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-2020-newsletter-may-2020.pdf).
(See also EC SWD page 20 in COM(2020) 625.

h) Embed combined forms of mobility, i.e. physical – which must remain the core format - ,blended[7] and/or virtual[8] in the curricula, in order to increase mobility for students and graduates at all levels and make internationalization at home a reality in line with the quality standards in Europe and in Member States[9].

i) Make lifelong learning a reality in higher education, by offering diverse education opportunities and introducing innovative and student-centred pedagogies, jointly delivered across European inter-university campuses, where a diverse student body can build flexible learning paths at all levels of their studies and career. Although not deviating from and undermining the core principle of full degree programmes, micro-credentials[10] could help widen learning opportunities to accommodate non-traditional learners and the demand for new skills in the labour market**;** make the learning experience more flexible and modular; support access to higher education; and engage learners, regardless of their previous qualifications or backgrounds, promoting reskilling and upskilling opportunities, while ensuring quality **[…]education**.

j) Promote practical and/or work-based experience supported by external mentors to foster an entrepreneurial mind-set, and develop civic engagement.

k) Strive for **[…]balanced mobility of students, mobility of staff and brain circulation,** within the alliances**[…]**.

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[7] Combination of physical mobility and a virtual component, facilitating collaborative online learning exchange/teamwork. European Commission. ERASMUS+ Programme Guide (version 1 of 25/03/2021), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en

[8] Virtual Mobility is a set of activities supported by Information and Communication Technologies, including e-learning, that realise or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching, training or learning. European Commission. ERASMUS+ Programme Guide (version 1 of 25/03/2021), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en

[9] Namely the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

[10] A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. (Provisional definition from the Final report ad-hoc consultation group with experts on higher education: A European approach to micro-credentials - output of the micro-credentials higher education consultation group - https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf).

l)   Create new, more inclusive and innovative learning environments that reach out to all learners including disadvantaged and non-traditional learners and contribute to strengthening the quality and social dimension of European higher education systems.

m)   Contribute to strengthen the research and innovation dimensions of higher education institutions in Europe by developing a common agenda, shared infrastructures and resources, fostering critical mass, strengthening human capital and **[…]involving** non-academic actors in teaching and research, connecting with surrounding innovation ecosystems, with citizens and society.

n)   Foster 'European Universities' as "testbeds" for innovative teaching and for research, including **[…]**academic career assessment and rewarding systems that take into account inter alia open science practices, quality of teaching, transfer of knowledge and outreach; improved tenure track systems and strengthened career management and diversification; and adoption of open science principles and practices, including the European Open Science Cloud and the open access publishing infrastructures, knowledge and data sharing, as well as open collaboration.

o)   Promote the endorsement of the "European Charter for Researchers" and of the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers[11]", and their implementation mechanisms, including the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) and EURAXESS, [PLACEHOLDER and the future ERA Talent Platform respectively] oriented to foster European research career development practices, applied to multiple career pathways.

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[11]   2005/251/EC.

p) Encourage the full use of the EU's excellent research and innovation capacity in the higher education and research sectors, supporting highly skilled and competitive European researchers, increased research excellence and reinforced knowledge transfer and innovation capacity in Europe, through closer links with Horizon Europe, and career operability across borders, disciplines and sectors.

q) Help identify the obstacles to the full use of the European Universities initiative's potential and, to the extent possible, propose **[…]**solutions**, which could benefit the entire higher education system,** to be taken at the legally responsible decision-making level.

r) Act as role models for European higher education transformation, for **further[…]** implementation of the Bologna key commitments, including automatic recognition of qualifications and mobility periods abroad, and as a bridge between the EEA and the ERA, in full synergy with the EHEA.

s) Contribute to increase excellence in research and quality in education, including in the international context, thereby contributing to competitiveness of the European higher education sector amidst the global race for talents, including through internationalisation of higher education institutions, cooperation to solve global challenges, promotion of fundamental academic values, as well as common European values, cooperation in tackling foreign interference[12], reform of **research** assessment systems and **[…]**careers and protecting research findings and intellectual assets in conformity with the open access and open data principles at the EU level.

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[12] Foreign interference occurs when activities are carried out by, or on behalf of a foreign actor, which are coercive, covert, deceptive or corrupting and are contrary to the EU's sovereignty, values and interests.
https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/euobs-media/3ef6dc3d60ee27a2df16f62d47e93fdc.pdf

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH FULL REGARD TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDARITY, INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO:

32. Fully use the potential of all available regional, national and EU funding mechanisms, including the new opportunities under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon Europe, and the InvestEU, towards strengthening the links between education and training, research, and innovation, to support the European Universities initiative.

33. Strive to find – where possible - co-funding mechanisms for higher education institutions engaged in the European Universities initiative, based on their basic and performance-based funding or specific funding programmes, or strategic funds**.**

34. Support capacity building for regions with lower research and innovation intensity, thereby ultimately contributing to reduce the research and innovation gap as well as regional disparities in access to higher education, strengthening excellence and fostering a more balanced participation of higher education institutions also in future alliances.

35. Work together at international, national and regional level, as well as between governments and institutions, to identify and remove, where necessary, the obstacles towards more compatible higher education systems and closer strategic alliances of higher education institutions, building on the extensive work that has already been developed through the EEA, the EHEA and the ERA.

36. Make full use of supporting measures such as the European Student Card Initiative, automatic mutual recognition[13] of qualifications and mobility periods within study and training programmes, including by digital means, in order to remove obstacles to mobility and career development.

37. Identify and remove, where necessary, obstacles to a European approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, by reinforcing institutional linkages and procedures between evaluation, accreditation, and quality assurance agencies registered on EQAR, to find modalities of automatic mutual recognition, as well as by facilitating the implementation of quality assurance procedures and encouraging joint **evaluation and** accreditation of study programmes.

38. Defend and promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy as a central principle of a well-functioning quality-based and dynamic higher education system, in line with commitments made by Ministers responsible for Higher Education of the EHEA and Ministers of Research[14].

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[13] In line with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1., and in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

[14] Statement of Academic Freedom annexed to the Rome Communiqué adopted on 19 November 2020 at the Ministerial conference of the European Higher Education Area, as well as in the Bonn declaration of 20 October 2020.

INVITES THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, IN LINE WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES AND WITH FULL REGARD TO THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE, TO:

39. Keep fostering the establishment of excellent, flexible, diverse, generally geographically balanced and sustainable models of alliances, linked to local and regional ecosystems, encouraging education, research, innovation and creativity, and the development of good practices for cooperation that can be inspiring role models to other higher education institutions, aiming at seamless balanced mobility of students, **mobility[…] of teachers,** staff **and brain circulation**, as well as open recruitment and more attractive career and working conditions for researchers and staff.

40. Ensure scale up inter alia by enabling the 'European Universities' to share their good practices and experiences with all higher education institutions across Europe, ensuring that the reforms, outputs and innovations triggered by the 'European Universities' are fully accessible for those that do not participate in these alliances, while valuing the experiences of other international collaborative initiatives.

41. Jointly explore the necessary steps to enable to test the use of micro-credentials in higher education in order to help widen learning opportunities and to strengthen the role of higher education institutions in lifelong learning.

42. Support the 'European Universities', whilst respecting their institutional autonomy, to create the capacity and appropriate environments for fostering sustainable modern infrastructures and career paths as well as attractive working conditions and **promote brain circulation [...]amongst** all partners.

43. Create stronger synergies between the higher education dimension of the EEA, the ERA and the EHEA. The 'European Universities' can be instrumental for developing important bridges with their research and challenge-based learning and teaching approaches.

44. Consider more sustainable funding instruments for the 'European Universities', including through exploiting synergies **[…]of** regional **and** national **[…]with** European schemes, so that they are able to deliver on their ambitious strategy, which requires structural and institutional changes. To reach the initiative´s ambitious goals, a fit for purpose, funding per alliance will be necessary, including for the alliances already selected, while taking into account the diversity of the models of cooperation and variety in national and regional funding systems.

45. Foster the development and use of innovative, effective and inclusive learning, teaching, open science and **open** education practices, as well as simplified administrative procedures by supporting the 'European Universities' in the development and implementation of strategies for digital infrastructures and IT tools.

46. Support the 'European Universities' in reaching the ambitious target of 50% mobile students[15], focusing on balanced physical, virtual or blended mobility schemes and brain circulation, acknowledging that physical mobility is a priority and cannot be replaced by other forms of mobility, which have complementary roles.

47. Ensure that the initiative is inclusion and excellence based, open to all types of higher education institutions and to all students, **teachers, staff** and researchers promoting the use of common and shared infrastructures, equipment and facilities.

48. Regularly and jointly monitor[16] the state of play of the 41 alliances of the European Universities initiative, as well as possible additional ones, in close cooperation with the 'European Universities' and all relevant stakeholders, to document results achieved and impact made on the education and research dimensions as well as on society, and to identify barriers, shortcomings, challenges and possible solutions, to ensure a smooth operation and implementation of their transnational activities.

49. Organise continuous exchanges between the European Commission, Member States, the 'European Universities' and the ad-hoc expert group composed of experts from the Member States, and other relevant stakeholders, in order to monitor progress, discuss and tackle existing barriers to cooperation, develop solutions and put them in place.

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[15] European Commission. (2020). Erasmus+ Programme Guide. Version 3 (2020): 25/08/2020, p.132, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/erasmus_programme_guide_2020_v3_en.pdf

[16] Member States, European Commission (DG EAC and DG RTD).

50. Encourage higher education institutions to embrace continuous transformation in order to make the most of their **[…]**missions covering **[…]**education**[…],** research**, innovation and service to society** in the EEA and the ERA in full synergy with the EHEA.

51. Support a sustainable cooperation between higher education institutions at European level that realises the objectives of both the EEA, the ERA and the EHEA and strengthening the competitiveness of 'European Universities' in the international context and the global race for **attracting and retaining** talent, as well as enabling them to connect with local and regional ecosystems.

52. Support and encourage the European Universities' to **increase […]**students and staff **involvement in the alliances […]which is essential for the success, development and implementation of the initiative, namely by including them into the respective governance structures.**

53. **[…]**Within the context of the EEA and in full respect of the national and regional higher education systems, develop clear proposals, starting from 2022, hand in hand with the relevant higher education national and regional authorities, higher education institutions and stakeholders, to help remove where necessary the obstacles for cooperation at the European level, by exploring, for example, the need and feasibility for**[…] joint European degrees** within the alliances of European Universities, and by promoting further European cooperation on quality assurance and automatic mutual recognition in higher education.

INVITES THE COMMISSION, IN LINE WITH ITS COMPETENCES AND WITH FULL REGARD TO THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE, TO:

54. **Submit by 2021 a proposal with a view of the further development of the 'European Universities' and the rollout of their full and ambitious potential.**

55. Support the development of 'European Universities' as "testbeds" for interoperability and promotion of cooperation between Member States regarding European research, teaching and staff career development practices, including the feasibility of a stepwise approach to joint recruitment schemes working towards the effective brain circulation **and the free […]**flow of knowledge **[…]**across Europe, seeking to increase attractiveness of European academic and research careers bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity and the autonomy of higher education institutions, as well as respecting differences in national and regional labour market systems.

56. Prepare guidelines on how EU programmes, funds and financial instruments could**, in line with their objectives, […]complement the** support **for** the 'European Universities' and other types of higher education institution alliances, in a **[…]**simplified, and streamlined manner, with a sound budget and for an extended defined period, while fostering related synergies.

57. Maintain the successful bottom-up, inclusive, excellence based and geographically balanced approaches in the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, with the support of Horizon Europe, giving all types of higher education institutions, including cross border co-operations and other international collaborative initiatives the opportunity to develop ambitious 'European Universities', testing different models for cooperation and being thematically open.

58. Encourage 'European Universities' to make best use of policies and initiatives that support them to become more innovative and entrepreneurial, such as, for example, HEInnovate and InvestEU, and promote collaboration with Horizon Europe, to provide synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.

59. Support active exchange schemes between academia and industry, as the direct contact between them would bring added value and would better respond to the labour market needs.

60. Consider the use of the existing online platforms to promote and support the 'European Universities' and to allow the exchanges of best practices and experiences.

61. Continue close cooperation with Member States **and regularly inform the Council on the progress of the initiative** in the co-creation **process** and further development of the 'European Universities', namely through the Erasmus+ Programme Committee **[…]**and **[…]**the Horizon Europe Programme committee including the configuration for widening participation and strengthening the ERA**, as well as through the ad hoc expert group[…] and** the ERA Forum for Transition.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

62. Council conclusions on a renewed European Agenda for higher education (20 November 2017)

63. Conclusions of the European Council (14 December 2017)

64. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan (17 January 2018)

65. Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (22 May 2018)

66. Conclusions of the European Council (28 June 2018)

67. Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (26 November 2018)

68. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence (7 December 2018)

69. Council conclusions 'Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030' (9 April 2019)

70. Council conclusions on the future of a highly digitised Europe beyond 2020: 'Boosting digital and economic competitiveness across the Union and digital cohesion' (7 June 2019)

71. European Council: A New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 (20 June 2019)

72. Council conclusions on the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition in support of inclusive and sustainable growth (8 November 2019)

73. Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems (8 November 2019)

74. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - 'The European Green Deal' (11 December 2019)

75. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'A strong Social Europe for just Transition' (14 January 2020)

76. Council Resolution on education and training in the European Semester: ensuring informed debates on reforms and investments (20 February 2020)

77. Council conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (16 June 2020)

78.   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience" (1 July 2020)

79.   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – Resetting education and training for the digital age (30 September 2020)

80.   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (30 September 2020)

81.   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A new ERA for Research and Innovation (1 October 2020)

82.   Rome Communiqué adopted at the Ministerial conference of the European Higher Education Area (19 November 2020)

83.   Council Conclusions on digital education in Europe's knowledge societies (24 November 2020)

84. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (24 November 2020)

85. Council conclusions on the New European Research Area (1 December 2020)

86. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (18 February 2021)

87. [PLACEHOLDER: Council Conclusions on Deepening the ERA providing researchers with attractive and sustainable research careers and working conditions (xx May 2021)]

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