

EURASHE briefing – XCIII Meeting of the BFUG

Dear members of the BFUG,

We are providing you with this written update as an extension of the oral update given by our Representatives during the BFUG meeting XCIII in Budapest in September 2024.

Message from EURASHE President Hannes Raffaseder

Dear BFUG Colleagues,

As we reflect on the Tirana conference and embark on the new cycle under the leadership of Romania and Moldova until 2027, I would like to thank you for your continued cooperation in building a stronger EHEA. At this pivotal moment, EURASHE calls for even greater ambition to make European higher education more integrated, innovative, and responsive to society's needs. Despite geopolitical uncertainty and the risk of disinvestment in higher education and research, we cannot allow our ambitions to be reduced and should keep demonstrating the value that knowledge and skills bring to our economies and societies. EURASHE joins in the calls for increasing the Erasmus and Horizon funds to strengthen competitiveness by harnessing more of Europe's talent and innovation.

One of EURASHE's priorities in the upcoming period is to work closely with countries and partners to enhance our understanding of national strategies that support lifelong learning. We would like to focus on the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in economic transitions, including the green and digital agendas. We would like to explore how student centered learning and micro-credentials can bolster lifelong learning, improve access to higher education for diverse student groups, and strengthen the link between higher education, innovation, and the world of work.

In line with the BFUG's intention to streamline the agenda for 2024–2027, we look forward to discussing the next work programme. In particular, and in contrast to the previous two cycles, there seems to be a consensus that Learning and Teaching (L&T) should be integrated across all the structures rather than being subject to a stand-alone working group. This will provide more space for this core subject and involve diverse voices from within the EHEA community.

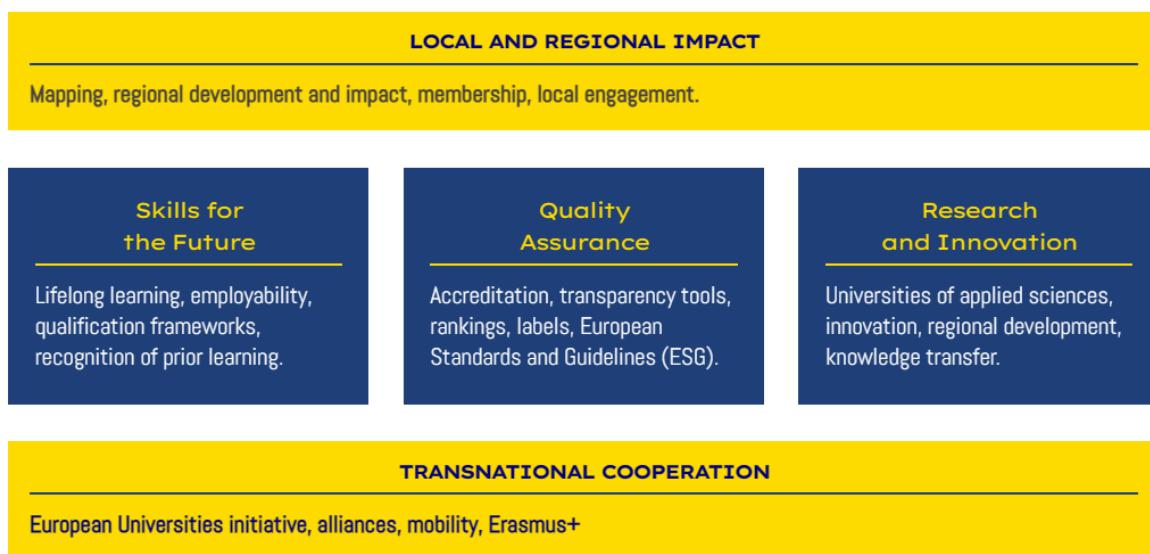
To ensure adequate space for topical debates, we propose extending the timeframe of Bologna meetings. The current 1.5-day format often limits in-depth discussion, particularly on pressing and strategic issues.

EURASHE urges countries to fully implement the key commitments, as many obstacles to mobility between different EQF levels and countries persist. For instance, despite integrating short-cycle higher education into the EHEA in the 2018 Paris Communiqué, students seeking to continue their education in other countries still face obstacles to recognition. Beyond integration, higher education must actively address Europe's challenges, notably social and territorial inequality of opportunity. To retain citizens' trust, higher education must demonstrate accountability to society. We urge a strong commitment to fulfilling the Tirana Communiqué commitments to fostering competences for digital and green transitions and enhancing higher education's local and regional impact.

September's meeting in Budapest is the first since the Tirana Ministerial Conference. I would like to thank all the outgoing and upcoming co-chairs for their efforts and while I cannot personally join you on this occasion, I send all my best wishes from Austria.

EURASHE Strategic Priorities

Our strategy for 2023-2025 aims to make EURASHE a reference point for a wide range of policymakers and higher education institutions that seek to harness the power of applied higher education to address the green and digital transitions. The thematic priorities are shown in the figure below. Three horizontal subjects (Skills, Quality in HE and Applied Research) are complemented by two overarching concerns, namely to promote both local engagement and transnational cooperation.



In 2024, EURASHE dedicated its annual conference to the priority of transnational cooperation, building on the momentum of the European Universities Initiative. In the most recent Erasmus+ call, several alliances were awarded funding that focus specifically on applied education and research. Furthermore, EURASHE is pleased that a Community of Practice has been established with the support of Erasmus+ funding, and that we can contribute as an associate partner.

Applied universities are close to the world of work and regional skills ecosystems. Therefore EURASHE is involved in the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CovE) initiative, both as a beneficiary in one of the Erasmus+ supported CoVEs and in working groups set up by the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. While they are part of the same section of the Erasmus+ Programme, and despite calls in the European Strategy for Universities, much more could be done to integrate these two flagship initiatives of the European Education Area.

The importance of applied higher education and work based learning was demonstrated this month by a EURASHE site visit to Aix-Marseilles University (AMU). While France does not have a binary systems of traditional and applied universities, AMU joined EURASHE last year to collaborate at European level on the subject of skills ecosystems and regional labour market demands. The site visit included examples of applied higher education in other non-binary systems, namely Spain and the United Kingdom.

EURASHE Communities of Practice

The EURASHE Communities of Practice were established in 2022 to develop the three horizontal priorities of the 2023-2025 strategy (Skills, Quality of HE and Applied Research). The Communities of Practice are open to both EURASHE members and non-members. A core group meets more regularly while the wider group benefits from virtual forms of cooperation and information sharing as well as online meetings.

EURASHE invites members of the BFUG to share the following links to join the communities among the higher education community:

 Join EURASHE Skills Community of Practice [here](#)

 Join EURASHE Quality Assurance Community of Practice [here](#)

 Join EURASHE Research Community of Practice [here](#)

EURASHE Annual Conference

On 22-23 May 2024, just before the Tirana Ministerial, EURASHE organised the 33rd edition of its Annual Conference, hosted by the St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (St. Pölten, Austria). The title of the event was Stronger Together: Fostering Transnational Cooperation in Applied Universities and builds on the experience of the European Universities Initiative and other examples of deep transnational cooperation among applied higher education institutions.

The event featured high-level keynote speeches and panel discussions on several topics linked to transnational cooperation and breakout sessions on the EURASHE core themes of applied research, quality assurance, skills, and regional impact. European Commission Director Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot opened the event with an inspiring keynote speech, while Pedro Teixeira, former Portuguese Secretary of State for Higher Education, gave a provocative presentation about the missions of European Universities Alliances. Participants enjoyed five plenary sessions discussing transnational cooperation from different angles, e.g. policy, collaboration with extra-European institutions, and the involvement of students.

In addition, the event offered stimulating breakout sessions on quality assurance, lifelong learning, applied research, and regional impact, plus a focus on European-funded projects and the latest updates from the three EURASHE Communities of Practice. Overall, all discussions emphasised that no matter which part of the continent we are based in, we all share the same challenges and for this we need to push for deeper collaboration between our institutions.

We now turn our attention to next year's Conference, which will take place at the [Polytechnic University of Portalegre](#) (Portugal) **on 14-15 May, 2025**, and focus on the subject of regional competitiveness. We hope to see you there!

Forthcoming EURASHE Position papers

Forthcoming position papers include a package on research policy, including the next European Framework Programme (FP10), and Open Science.

[List of EURASHE Projects can be found here](#)