

Declaration of German U15, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Udice on international cooperation

Ahead of the ERA Forum's Standing Subgroup on the Global Approach meeting at the beginning of May, where Member States representatives will be invited to exchange on the principles for international cooperation in research and innovation, the German U15, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Udice wish to reiterate their commitment to strengthen international cooperation in research, while mitigating the challenges associated with international partnerships.

On 7 March 2022, on the eve of the meeting devoted to international cooperation of European ministers in charge of higher education, research and innovation, and before the meeting of Heads of State devoted to the future of European development the German U15, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Udice met in Marseille at the invitation of Udice to discuss the challenges of international scientific cooperation in the European and global geopolitical context.

This meeting took place at a time when our Ukrainian colleagues and partners are undergoing an intolerable attack that raises questions about the framework, the impact and the challenges of international cooperation. European research universities stand in deep solidarity with Ukrainian academia. We understand that we have a strong responsibility to provide help and support for students and researchers from Ukraine. We also express our readiness to offer assistance and support to Russian refugee scholars and students who have been forced to leave their country because of their public opposition to the war. We aim to make it possible for students and researchers who have fled from the war to continue their studies and projects at our institutions. And we have equally to do everything we can to support universities and research institutions in Ukraine.

At the same time, we fully support the commitment of the [Communication on the Global Approach to Research and Innovation](#) to rules-based multilateralism and the [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#). On this basis, we support the suspension of formal scientific relations with the Russian regime that is putting scientists, students and university communities in Ukraine under direct attack, and with the academic institutions supporting it.

In this context, German U15, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Udice wish to express and share the following principles on international cooperation:

1) International cooperation is essential for the progress of science and benefits humanity as a whole

The COVID-19 pandemic has indisputably illustrated the need for international scientific cooperation to meet the major challenges of our time. Today, research can only be conducted within the framework of international networks for sharing knowledge, equipment and personnel.

In the wake of the Communication on the Global Approach to Research and Innovation released in May 2021 by the European Commission, and the [Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation](#) in March 2022, Europe and governments must support this international openness that will

bring about innovations and solutions to present and future challenges.

2) Research universities are willing to help prevent risks associated with international cooperation

We are at the same time concerned about being able to conduct safe, fair, and balanced collaborations in a context of increased threats to academic freedom, institutional autonomy and research security.

The recent publication of the European Commission's [Staff Working Document on tackling R&I foreign interference](#) is welcomed by our networks of research universities, as it offers valuable guidance on how to pursue international engagement while remaining vigilant about maintaining our values, our governance systems, our ability to maintain partnerships, and while being aware of the risks, particularly in terms of cyber threats. Noting the value of these guidelines, we call on European governments to be careful not to interfere in the institutional autonomy of our own universities for the sake of defending them against others. We assert our commitment to share our experiences and good practices within our communities in order to generalize shared principles.

3) International scientific cooperation by research universities is a major diplomatic tool

Necessary for scientific progress, international cooperation conducted by research universities also contributes to good understanding between peoples and states. Through the exchange of ideas, the mobility of students and researchers and the collective questioning of shared issues, international cooperation cements alliances between nations, enables the articulation of shared interests at the global level, and ensures the promotion of the values of democracy, freedom of expression, equality, inclusiveness, and respect for the rule of law, even in regions where these values may be challenged. Where international crises have arisen, we affirm the importance of science collaboration and critical thinking in the development of a stable, sustainable post-conflict order.

Research universities play a critical role in bolstering Europe's ability to face global challenges, by establishing reliable and long-standing partnerships across the world. Hence, the role of research universities in designing and implementing European scientific diplomacy must be promoted, recognized and strongly supported.

In the current geopolitical context, disrupted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we call for the opening of a debate on the new stakes and forms of scientific diplomacy, and on the challenges raised by academic collaborations with institutions located in countries with non-multilateral, authoritarian regimes undermining the very foundations of diplomacy.

4) European programmes in favour of academic and scientific cooperation must contribute to making Europe a more attractive territory, open to cooperation with the rest of the world

In a context of global competition to attract talent, we consider that the openness of the European Education and Research Areas make them especially attractive.

We would like to see European funding programs for collaboration in education, research and innovation open up more to third countries. This is all the more essential at a time when Europe and its values are under attack, far beyond the borders of the EU, making it essential we overcome our differences within the continent.

In this respect, we reiterate our support for the participation of the United Kingdom and Switzerland in the Horizon Europe program as associated countries. Association would benefit all parties involved and make Europe both stronger and more sovereign. This was never more important than today.

With respect to reciprocal commitments co-constructed for the benefit of all, we thus also encourage an increased participation of third countries in the Horizon Europe programme, according to the conditions laid out in the Horizon regulation. In a similar way and for equally strategic reasons in terms of developing a strong identity for the European Higher Education Area, its attractiveness, and the training of its talents through international exchanges, we support the development of further balanced international partnerships in the field of education and training (Erasmus+).

5) Research universities are one of the pillars of European development and technological sovereignty

Through their global competitiveness, research universities play a key role in making Europe the global heart of research and innovation.

Research universities are in a privileged position to achieve this ambition: they conduct fundamental research that drives future innovations; they are positioned at the centre of territorial ecosystems that bring together academics, local governments, organizations that support innovation, industry and civil society. They have the capacity to address complex issues at the crossroads of several disciplinary fields and are integrated into international networks distinguished by cutting-edge science and innovation.

We fully agree with the European Commission's observation, expressed in the [Communication on a European Strategy for Universities](#), that funding for higher education and research in Europe is insufficient. We call for massive investment in post-secondary education and research excellence, including increased support for basic research and the implementation of the necessary conditions to make Europe the most attractive territory for students and researchers from around the world.

We call for enhanced national investment based on scientific excellence and underline the critical importance of European funding instruments for frontier science, notably the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Investment in breakthrough knowledge is a major pillar of European growth. As key players in European research excellence, research universities must more than ever be supported as an essential pillar of Europe's technological sovereignty, of European development and of social development.

6) International collaboration in research and higher education is essential for the sustainable and balanced development of all regions in the world

While international development policies and research policies have historically been dissociated, sustainable development worldwide requires massive investment in research and higher education, in order to achieve the transition towards knowledge societies and the reconstruction of post-war, post-conflict societies. Only in this way will we be able to produce innovative solutions and paradigm shifts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, universities are key actors for a sustainable transition, as they provide for the training of the next generation of skilled workers, researchers, innovators and decision-makers.

Research universities therefore call for the strengthening of the research and educative capacities of their counterparts worldwide, in particular in the Global South. European development funding instruments (e.g. the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) should be better mobilized to create career opportunities for young researchers in the Global South and reverse brain drain, and to build the overall research capacities of universities in the long term. These instruments should also be used to foster science and educational collaboration in Europe's neighbourhood countries and in candidate member states, to strengthen academic institutions and civil society at the EU's borders.

German U15

The German U15 represents fifteen leading research-intensive universities. Our universities are among the most academically distinguished and internationally renowned institutions of the German science system. We are dedicated to outstanding research and excellent teaching and are proud to attract bright students and scholars from all over the world. Our universities take active responsibility for society and the advancement of academic values and trust in science. The German U15 advocates for the best conditions for university-based research, teaching and transfer activities.

The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities

Founded in 2016, The Guild comprises twenty-one of Europe's most distinguished research-intensive universities in sixteen countries and is dedicated to enhancing the voice of academic institutions, their researchers and their students. The Guild is committed to the pursuit of excellence, the importance of truth-seeking and trust-building as the foundation of public life, and the creation of new knowledge for the benefit of society, culture and economic growth.

Udice

A group of ten leading French universities working for excellence in research, performance in higher education and the development of attractive innovation ecosystems.