



EU-CONEXUS Policy Brief

N°13 – May/June 2026



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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR ALLIANCES

May 2026

Council position on Erasmus+ 2028–2034: strong political recognition of European Universities Alliances

On 11 May 2026, the Council agreed its partial negotiating position on the future Erasmus+ Regulation for 2028–2034. The text is highly relevant for European Universities Alliances, as it confirms that the next Erasmus+ programme should support long-term strategic transnational cooperation at institutional level and recognises the specific role of European Universities Alliances as structural cooperation instruments. The Council text introduces a definition of European Universities Alliances as groups of European higher education institutions engaged in transnational, long-term and structural cooperation, confirmed in a joint mission statement and offering joint education provision, with objectives linked to mobility, knowledge transfer, research and innovation, and service to society.

Of particular importance is recital 30 of the Council text, which states that Erasmus+ should sustainably support the core education mission of the European Universities Alliances, enabling systemic impact through long-term Union-level action. This mission is described as encompassing future-oriented skills and competences, relevant and future-proof study programmes, pedagogical innovation, joint degrees, lifelong learning and micro-credentials. The same recital also connects the Alliances' research and innovation dimension with the broader competitiveness agenda, indicating that support for all dimensions of the Alliances should be pursued through synergies with other instruments, including Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: This is a significant political signal for the next phase of the initiative. It confirms that European Universities Alliances are increasingly framed not as temporary cooperation projects, but as long-term instruments for institutional transformation, skills development, joint education provision and stronger links between education, research, innovation and societal engagement. For EU-CONEXUS, the Council text strengthens the case for a long-term operating model, clearer institutional embedding and a stronger articulation of the Alliance's contribution to coastal sustainability, talent development and regional innovation ecosystems.

References:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/05/11/erasmusplus-council-agrees-position-on-the-eu-s-flagship-programme-for-education-and-training-youth-and-sport/>
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8265-2026-INIT/en/pdf>

April–May 2026

Next EU long-term budget: positive signals for Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, but final figures remain open

The European Parliament has set out its position on the next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034. According to ACA's analysis, MEPs proposed an increase of approximately 10% compared with the Commission's July 2025 proposal. In current prices, this would bring the total EU budget to EUR 2.01 trillion, with Erasmus+ rising to EUR 47.39 billion and Horizon Europe to EUR 200 billion. ACA also notes, however, that higher education stakeholders warn that even this increase may mainly sustain existing activity levels rather than enable significant expansion.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: The MFF negotiations will determine whether the political recognition of Alliances is matched by adequate and predictable resources. EU-CONEXUS should continue monitoring the budget debate closely, particularly the balance between Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the future European Competitiveness Fund and national co-funding. The central question is no longer only whether Alliances will be supported, but whether the funding architecture will be sufficiently stable and flexible to sustain institutional transformation beyond short project cycles.

References:

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/european-parliament-sets-out-position-on-next-eu-long-term-budget/>

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20260423IPR41835/eu-long-term-budget-responding-to-citizens-expectations-and-major-challenges>

May 2026

European Competitiveness Fund and FP10: Alliances need a visible place in the research and innovation architecture

The debate on the European Competitiveness Fund has become directly relevant for European Universities Alliances. Science|Business reports that Alliances welcomed the Council's backing for links between Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and the future European Competitiveness Fund, especially after the European Parliament's draft report on the ECF removed references to European Universities Alliances. The issue is not merely symbolic: it concerns whether higher education institutions and Alliances will be explicitly recognised as actors in Europe's future competitiveness, innovation and talent agenda.

In response to those developments concerning the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the proposed amendments affecting the participation of Higher Education Institutions and European University Alliances, the Agricultural University of Athens, member of the EU-CONEXUS European University Alliance, undertook the coordination of the 16 Greek Higher Education Institutions participating in the European Universities Initiative. Through a rapid and coordinated national effort, the Greek European University Alliances jointly prepared and submitted a **common Position Paper within the official ITRE amendments deadline**, reaffirming the strategic importance of preserving a clear legal basis for the participation and continued European support of the European University Alliances within the future ECF framework.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: EU-CONEXUS should frame its contribution beyond education cooperation alone. Its added value lies in connecting education, research, innovation, skills, regional ecosystems and societal needs around coastal sustainability. The emerging EU competitiveness agenda offers an opportunity, but also a risk: if Alliances are not clearly included in the legal and financial architecture of future instruments, their research and innovation dimension may remain underfunded despite strong political expectations.

Reference:

<https://sciencebusiness.net/news/fp10/european-universities-alliances-welcome-council-backing>

EU-CONEXUS PARTICIPATION IN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

14 April 2026

European Universities Coordinators Working Retreat: from pilot phase to structural instrument

On 14 April 2026, coordinators of European Universities Alliances met in Brussels for a working retreat with the European Commission. The discussion focused on the design of the future Erasmus+ action supporting Alliances in the 2028–2034 period, mobility and international cooperation, the role of Alliances in EU competitiveness and the European Research Area, and future performance monitoring. ACA underlines that discussions on future mechanisms — particularly funding, mobility ambitions and international scope — remain closely connected to the MFF negotiations and the future design of flagship EU programmes.

EU-CONEXUS was represented by Fernando Pedraza, Fernando Galán and Neringa Narbutienė. The internal EU-CONEXUS report from the meeting highlights a clear political message: the European Universities Initiative is now being treated as a structural instrument for the future of European higher education, not as a temporary experiment. Alliances are increasingly expected to demonstrate institutional transformation, ecosystem impact, talent attraction, policy relevance and transferable results beyond their own consortium.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: The retreat confirms several priorities already identified internally: a clearer public narrative, stronger evidence of institutional transformation, sharper positioning of the EU-CONEXUS challenges, more visible research-and-ecosystem links, and a common stance on the future Erasmus+ framework. It also reinforces the need to move from a project portfolio logic towards a more explicit Alliance operating model.

References:

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/co-creating-the-future-of-european-universities-alliances/?articleId=8¤t=1&edition=2026&titleId=1>

Internal EU-CONEXUS report: Report on the European Universities Coordinators Working Retreat, Brussels, 14 April 2026

ADDITIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS TO MONITOR

June 2026

European Student Card Initiative beyond 2027: digital infrastructure for scaled mobility

The ESCI Consultation Conference, "European Student Card Initiative: Shaping student mobility beyond 2027", will take place on 11 June 2026 in Brussels. The conference will mark the conclusion of the stakeholder consultation on the future of ESCI in the next Erasmus+ programme and will present the main findings from the survey and workshops carried out in 2026.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: ESCI is not a purely technical file. It affects the administrative feasibility of student mobility, digital student status verification, mobility management, interoperability of systems and the student experience across institutions. For an Alliance developing joint programmes, blended mobility and multi-campus learning pathways, the future ESCI framework will be a key enabling infrastructure.

Reference:

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/european-student-card-initiative/events/european-student-card-initiative-shaping-student-mobility-beyond-2027>

April 2026

Blended mobility and BIPs: building an evidence base before setting future targets

ACA has launched a new study, "Mapping the benefits of blended mobility", focused on blended mobility and Blended Intensive Programmes. The study will examine participation patterns, student motivations, perceived benefits and challenges, transversal skills development, and whether blended mobility can act as a springboard to further Erasmus+ mobility. It will also consider how factors such as institutional type, national context and participation in European Universities Alliances influence uptake. Data collection will take place from May to August 2026, with a final report expected in December 2026.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: This is directly connected to the Alliance's internal discussions on mobility definitions, realistic mobility targets, short learning experiences, internationalisation at home and inclusion. Future EU-CONEXUS mobility monitoring should be able to capture not only semester mobility, but also blended, short-term, virtual and challenge-based formats where they produce meaningful international exposure.

Reference:

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/mapping-the-benefits-of-blended-mobility-new-study/>

April 2026

Towards the new Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

Five Erasmus+ National Agencies — CMEPIUS, DAAD, EDUFI, Nuffic and OeAD — are working with ACA to support the strategic and operational revision of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education in view of the next Erasmus+ programme. The initiative aims to produce evidence-based recommendations and to strengthen ECHE as both a strategic and operational framework for higher education institutions, and as a steering and quality assurance tool for National Agencies.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: The ECHE remains the quality gateway for Erasmus+ participation. Its revision may have implications for mobility quality, inclusion, recognition, digitalisation, sustainability, compliance and monitoring. EU-CONEXUS partners should follow this process closely, since future ECHE requirements will shape the operational conditions under which Alliance mobility and cooperation activities are implemented.

Reference:

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/towards-the-new-erasmus-charter-for-higher-education-eche/>

April 2026

Pact for the Mediterranean Action Plan: implications for higher education and research

The first Action Plan under the Pact for the Mediterranean was adopted in April 2026. ACA notes that the Action Plan includes the implementation of a “Mediterranean University” initiative, intended to strengthen cooperation between higher education institutions in the region through a consortium of universities, a coordinating secretariat, joint programmes, micro-credentials and mobility of students, staff and researchers. The Action Plan foresees the establishment of a university consortium by Q2 2026, followed by a feasibility study for a future multi-campus institution and the rollout of joint programmes in Q3 2026.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: This development is particularly relevant to EU-CONEXUS because of its coastal and Mediterranean profile. It may open future opportunities for cooperation with Southern Mediterranean partners, especially around coastal sustainability, blue economy, climate resilience, joint learning pathways, micro-credentials and stakeholder-based innovation.

References:

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/pact-for-the-mediterranean-action-plan-implications-for-higher-education-and-research/?articleId=9&edition=2026&titleId=1>

https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/document/download/25110dc2-4b2d-4b0d-a037-e470776690f0_en?filename=Pact+for+the+Mediterranean_Action+Plan_Spring+2026_Final.pdf

March–May 2026

EHESO, HEInnovate and evidence-based institutional transformation

The European Higher Education Sector Observatory is increasingly becoming a practical tool for evidence-based institutional development. In March 2026, EHESO data was integrated into HEInnovate comparison features, allowing users to compare self-assessment results with more targeted aggregated groups, including by country, PhD-awarding status, institutional size, disciplinary profile and European Universities Alliance membership. The feature remains confidential and non-competitive, but it allows more meaningful reflection than comparison with a general average.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: This is aligned with the next phase of Alliance development. EU-CONEXUS will need stronger evidence of institutional transformation, not only activity reporting. EHESO and HEInnovate may support reflection on innovation capacity, impact measurement, internationalisation, leadership, governance and ecosystem engagement across partner institutions.

Reference:

<https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eheso/news/eheso-data-powers-new-comparison-features-in-heinnovate-strengthening-the-evidence-base-for-institutional-transformation>

January 2026

Fundamental academic values: from principle to operational condition

The European Commission has published a final report proposing guiding principles for protecting fundamental academic values. The report identifies six values: academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, staff and student participation in higher education governance, public responsibility for higher education, and public responsibility of higher education. It also links these principles to legislation, higher education leadership, structures to address violations, international partnerships, funding and quality assurance.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: Values are becoming an operational condition for trust-based transnational cooperation. For EU-CONEXUS, this is relevant to governance, student participation, international partnerships, quality assurance, research cooperation and the Alliance's role as a European civic space.

Reference:

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f307041a-f80a-11f0-b9bc-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

SELECTED UPCOMING EVENTS

2-3 June 2026

FOREU4ALL Workshop 3 – “From Campuses to Communities: Enhancing Engagement and Sense of Belonging in European Universities”

Strasbourg European Parliament

The third FOREU4ALL workshop, hosted by the EPICUR Alliance at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, will focus on strengthening community engagement, communication and sense of belonging within European Universities Alliances. The programme includes discussions and workshops on belonging, visibility, mobility barriers, recognition, student participation and the value of Alliances for students, staff and wider communities.

Relevance for EU-CONEXUS: The event is relevant for EU-CONEXUS communication and engagement priorities, particularly in strengthening internal belonging, student involvement and the Alliance’s visibility at local and European levels.

Reference: [Programme shared with EU-CONEXUS.](#)

10 June 2026

European Universities Rectors/Presidents High-level Meeting

Brussels, The Square, Mont des Arts

The European Commission will convene a high-level meeting of Rectors and Presidents of European Universities Alliances in Brussels. The draft agenda includes a keynote intervention by Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu and high-level round tables on the role of the European Universities Initiative in completing the European Education Area, attracting and retaining talent in Europe, modernising national and EU higher education systems, supporting the European Degree, and contributing to EU competitiveness and the Single Market’s fifth freedom for knowledge and innovation.

Reference: [Draft agenda shared with EU-CONEXUS.](#)

11 June 2026

ESCI Consultation Conference: “Shaping student mobility beyond 2027”

Centre Albert Borschette, Brussels

The conference will present the findings of the stakeholder consultation on the future of the European Student Card Initiative in the next Erasmus+ programme.

Reference:

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/european-student-card-initiative/events/european-student-card-initiative-shaping-student-mobility-beyond-2027>

2–3 July 2026

European Universities Initiative Symposium

WU Wien, Vienna

The EUI Symposium will bring together researchers, policy analysts and practitioners working on European Universities Alliances. The draft programme includes sessions on barriers and policy challenges, institutional transformation, governance, impact assessment, student agency, research and innovation, legal change and future policy perspectives. EU-CONEXUS will be represented in the programme through the paper "From Alliances to policy platforms: European University Alliances and the Joint European Degree Label as an implementation 'stress test'", by Fernando Galán and Laura Howard.

Reference: <https://www.wu.ac.at/en/eui26/eui26>

9–10 July 2026

4th European Universities Initiative Forum

Maynooth University, Ireland

The 4th European Universities Initiative Forum will take place at Maynooth University as part of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The theme of the Forum is "Walls That Stand, Scaffolding That Supports: The Future of the European University Alliances". The programme includes sessions on the state of the Alliances, the Rectors' perspective, future investment and sustainability, mobility, the European Degree, student participation, civic engagement, inclusion, education-research-innovation links and funding architecture beyond project cycles.

Reference: [Invitation shared with EU-CONEXUS.](#)

USEFUL LINKS

[Council position on Erasmus+ 2028–2034](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/05/11/erasmusplus-council-agrees-position-on-the-eu-s-flagship-programme-for-education-and-training-youth-and-sport/)

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/05/11/erasmusplus-council-agrees-position-on-the-eu-s-flagship-programme-for-education-and-training-youth-and-sport/>

[Council partial general approach – Erasmus+ 2028–2034](https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8265-2026-INIT/en/pdf)

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8265-2026-INIT/en/pdf>

[European Parliament position on the next EU long-term budget](https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/european-parliament-sets-out-position-on-next-eu-long-term-budget/)

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/european-parliament-sets-out-position-on-next-eu-long-term-budget/>

[Science|Business – European Universities Alliances and the European Competitiveness Fund](https://sciencebusiness.net/news/fp10/european-universities-alliances-welcome-council-backing)

<https://sciencebusiness.net/news/fp10/european-universities-alliances-welcome-council-backing>

[ACA – Co-creating the future of European Universities Alliances](https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/co-creating-the-future-of-european-universities-alliances/?articleId=8¤t=1&edition=2026&titleId=1)

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/co-creating-the-future-of-european-universities-alliances/?articleId=8¤t=1&edition=2026&titleId=1>

[ESCI Consultation Conference](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/european-student-card-initiative/events/european-student-card-initiative-shaping-student-mobility-beyond-2027)

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/european-student-card-initiative/events/european-student-card-initiative-shaping-student-mobility-beyond-2027>

[ACA – Mapping the benefits of blended mobility](https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/mapping-the-benefits-of-blended-mobility-new-study/)

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/mapping-the-benefits-of-blended-mobility-new-study/>

[ACA – Towards the new Erasmus Charter for Higher Education](https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/towards-the-new-erasmus-charter-for-higher-education-eche/)

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/towards-the-new-erasmus-charter-for-higher-education-eche/>

[ACA – Pact for the Mediterranean Action Plan](https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/pact-for-the-mediterranean-action-plan-implications-for-higher-education-and-research/?articleId=9&edition=2026&titleId=1)

<https://aca-secretariat.be/newsletter/pact-for-the-mediterranean-action-plan-implications-for-higher-education-and-research/?articleId=9&edition=2026&titleId=1>

[EHESO / HEInnovate institutional transformation tools](https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eheso/news/eheso-data-powers-new-comparison-features-in-heinnovate-strengthening-the-evidence-base-for-institutional-transformation)

<https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eheso/news/eheso-data-powers-new-comparison-features-in-heinnovate-strengthening-the-evidence-base-for-institutional-transformation>

[Guiding principles for protecting fundamental academic values](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f307041a-f80a-11f0-b9bc-01aa75ed71a1/language-en)

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f307041a-f80a-11f0-b9bc-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>