



REPORT**on participation in the SPHERE seminar****“European University Alliances as models for transnational cooperation and means for policy reform”**

Name of the event: SPHERE seminar “European University Alliances as models for transnational cooperation and means for policy reform”

Date: November 18-19, 2024.

Venue: online, SPHERE.

Participants from Ukraine: Higher Education Reform Experts and NEO representatives Svitlana SHYTIKOVA and Zhanna TALANOVA.

Target Audience: The event was specifically designed for Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs), NEOs and focused on the opportunities of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the university alliances it supports.

Purpose: The online SPHERE seminar aims to provide participants with insights into the policy and practice of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) through plenary discussions and workshops.

Learning Outcomes

- Contextualize the EUI within broader EU initiatives, including the European Education Area and the Higher Education Package.
- Enhance understanding of transnational inter-university collaboration by establishing a joint vision and shared governance responsibilities.
- Analyze the impact of alliances on higher education institutions (HEIs), including strategies for involving staff and students and their implications for internationalization.
- Gain insights into quality assurance and recognition processes within alliances, assessing the benefits and challenges of joint degrees.
- Reflect on alliances as examples that highlight achievements and gaps in the Bologna Process reforms.
- Explore implications for HERE and EU partner countries, focusing on participation in alliances and insights from related initiatives and policies

While focusing on the EUI and its alliances, the seminar also invited discussions on current European higher education policy and the Bologna Process commitments, targeting those involved in higher education policymaking at all experience levels. This online SPHERE seminar provided participants with an opportunity to learn about and discuss the policy and practice aspects of the EUI in plenary discussions and smaller workshop sessions.

The SPHERE seminar explored the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the university alliances that it supports. In 2019, the European Commission launched the EUI to enhance transnational collaboration among universities through larger alliances. These alliances are promoting innovative, integrated higher education across Europe, aiming to boost student and staff mobility, joint degree programs, and collaborative research projects. Funded under the Erasmus+ programme and supplemented by Horizon Europe, the EUI are a key strategy in achieving the European Education Area and plays a significant role in the European Strategy for Universities and the Higher Education Package.

How this matters to NEOs and HEREs: National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) and Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) have confirmed on various occasions their interest to learn more about the university alliances.

From Ukraine, the National Higher Education Reform Experts Team actively participated in the event, including Volodymyr LUGOVYY, First Vice-President of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Iryna ZOLOTARYOVA, member of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, Professor at the Semen Kuznets Kharkiv National Economic University, and Maryna MRUGA, State Expert of the Directorate of Vocational pre-tertiary and Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, European Follow Up Group Member. Maryna MRUGA asked questions to the seminar speakers and commented on the prospects of university alliances in the context of internationalization.

In general, on the first day of the seminar (November 18), more than 50 participants took part in the event, and on the second day (November 19) – more than 40 participants.

Development prospects for Ukraine:

Further development of university alliances is important for Ukraine, relevant steps are already being taken at the legislative level, as well as at the institutional level. Ukrainian higher education institutions are being involved in Erasmus+ projects, in particular in the European University Alliances projects, as well as the Ukrainian university alliance was created on European examples. But the strategic vision for the higher education development in this context needs to be updated by:

1. Development and implementation of the operational action plan 2025 to implement the Strategy for the Higher Education Development in Ukraine for 2022-2032, taking into account trends and approaches to university alliances in the European Higher Education Area.
2. Further improvement of the legislative framework of higher education in the context of European integration in order to expand the autonomy of universities and promote the creation of national and international university alliances to strengthen internationalization and competitiveness.