

2026 EUA General Assembly and Annual Conference

University cooperation in changing contexts

15-17 April 2026

Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Cooperation is a part of every university's DNA. Working across institutions, sectors and borders is a fundamental part of their vision, mission and operations. Indeed, cooperation in education, research and innovation, balanced with healthy competition, is a European hallmark of excellence. But are we at risk of taking it for granted?

In many parts of the world, the value of cooperation is increasingly being called into question. While universities work together in ever more original and effective ways, their relationships with governments and the public are increasingly strained in many countries.

The 2026 EUA Annual Conference, hosted by Yeditepe University in Istanbul, Türkiye, from 16-17 April, will shed light on how key drivers are shaping why, how and with whom universities cooperate. Such drivers include (geo)politics, technological advances, sustainable development and economic challenges.

The event will investigate the evolution of different types of university partnerships; between institutions, with the public sector, with industry and other partners – locally, nationally and internationally, through a mix of panel and interactive discussions.

Draft programme (as of 10 October 2025)

All times are local (TRT/UTC+3)

Wednesday 15 April 2026

16.00-18.00	<p>Leadership Roundtable Changing demographics: challenges and strategies</p> <p>Across Europe, shifting population trends are reshaping the landscape of higher education. Many countries face declining student numbers and growing imbalances across regions, raising difficult questions about how universities can remain both sustainable and inclusive.</p> <p>This year's Leadership Roundtable will facilitate an exchange between top-level university leaders on how institutions can adapt to demographic change. Topics will range from new recruitment and outreach strategies, changes to the academic offer and modes of delivery, as well as lessons learnt from integrating refugees into campus communities.</p> <p><i>*The EUA Leadership Roundtable, which precedes the Annual Conference, is open to executive heads (Rectors, Presidents, Vice-Chancellors) of EUA's individual and collective members. Participation is by invitation only and substitutes or representatives will not be accepted.</i></p>
	<p>18.00-19.00 Leadership Meet & Greet</p>

Thursday 16 April 2026

08.30-17.15	Registration for Annual Conference
08.00-09.00	Registration for General Assembly
08.00-09.15	Welcome coffee
09.30-11.00	<p>General Assembly</p> <p><i>*The General Assembly is reserved for EUA members. EUA affiliates may participate as observers.</i></p> <p>To learn more about the EUA General Assembly, please visit the dedicated event page.</p>
11.00-11.30	Coffee break
11.30-12.45	Conference opening & keynote speeches
12.45-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.00	<p>Plenary session 1 Universities and democracy: rethinking relationships of trust</p> <p>Universities depend on the trust of the societies they serve. In turn, they should sustain that trust through knowledge, dialogue and openness. Yet in many places, this relationship is under pressure. As public confidence in institutions shifts, and political and social divisions deepen, how can universities best earn and maintain the trust they need to thrive – and fulfil their societal role?</p> <p>The opening plenary will take a critical look at how universities engage with external communities, and what these relationships mean for democracy today.</p> <p>This session will share experiences and practices to build and rebuild trust in changing environments. Speakers will explore how cooperation, transparency and autonomy can reinforce universities' role as constructive actors in democratic life.</p>
15.00-16.15	<p>Breakout session 1A Strength in diversity: cooperating across sectors to serve society</p> <p>Universities increasingly need to ensure and demonstrate their positive impact on the wellbeing and development of their local, regional and national environments.</p> <p>To establish relevant objectives and a targeted approach to universities' service to society, well-designed cooperation initiatives between higher education institutions and non-university actors are often the most suitable path to take. This session will highlight notable examples from across Europe and the lessons learned by the universities that initiated them.</p> <p>Breakout session 1B How tech is transforming university cooperation</p> <p>Digitalisation is no longer merely seen as a means to speedier, more efficient workflows, but understood for its potential to transform how universities cooperate.</p> <p>This session will explore how sustained investment and concerted action among academic, industry and public sector bodies can inspire new and lasting forms of cooperation in the digital space. Presentations will showcase digitally-steered initiatives that reinforce institutional capacity to initiate and manage long-term change.</p>

	<p>Breakout session 1C Bridging sectors, boosting innovation: why cooperation matters in R&I</p> <p>In a policy context that strongly focuses on improving Europe's economic competitiveness, universities are crucial partners via their R&I collaborations with the private sector and other actors.</p> <p>This session will explore challenges and success factors for universities and reflect on what this changing context for the third mission means for their R&I collaborations with non-academic partners.</p> <p>Breakout session 1D Policy update: the Union of Skills</p> <p>In March 2025, the European Commission published a Communication on the Union of Skills, which puts increased policy attention on 'upskilling and reskilling' in order to shape an economically and technologically more competitive Europe.</p> <p>The session will provide an update on this highly relevant policy initiative for universities, briefing participants on EUA's work in this area and the potential impact of the Union of Skills on EU and national policies and funding.</p>
16.15-17.00	Coffee break
17.00-18.00	<p>Plenary session 2 Championing internal cooperation across faculties, cultures and backgrounds</p> <p>Cooperation is often associated with external engagement, but it begins within the institution.</p> <p>Internal cooperation is just as critical as building partnerships beyond the university. Not least because universities are among the most diverse institutions, encompassing a wide range of disciplines, cultures, and communities.</p> <p>This session will explore how leadership can foster meaningful internal collaboration across faculties, departments, and administrative units, reconcile competing interests and build alignment around shared institutional goals.</p>
19.30-22.00	Reception and dinner

Friday 17 April 2026

9.30-10.30	<p>Plenary session 3 Catalysts or clubs? Alliances and the future of internationalisation</p> <p>European Universities alliances have fostered unprecedented levels of cooperation, deepened institutional partnerships and tested bold approaches to joint education provision. But what does this mean for the broader internationalisation of European higher education?</p> <p>Have alliances created new pathways and ambitions for cooperation, or are they unintentionally consolidating 'islands of excellence' that may limit openness and inclusiveness?</p> <p>This plenary session will explore how alliances can serve as laboratories for international cooperation, the extent to which their models are scalable or transferable and the balance between deep integration and broader global engagement.</p>
10.30-11.00	Coffee break

11.00-12.15	<p>Breakout session 2A Futures thinking workshop: the European Universities Initiative in 2035</p> <p>This interactive session will apply futures thinking methodologies to three distinct forecasts for European Universities alliances in 2035.</p> <p>It is 2035. Your university still operates within the framework of the European Universities Initiative, but the landscape around you has transformed. Alliances may have become the backbone of a truly integrated European Education Area, or symbolic frameworks with little real impact.</p> <p>The future we will experience in 2035 is being shaped by today's choices. Back in 2025, the question is: what are the implications of each possible future for your university/alliance?</p> <p>Breakout session 2B Supporting at-risk higher education institutions and academics</p> <p>Support for at-risk academics is an important expression of solidarity and university values, but that is not all. It also helps to foster international research talent, benefits internationalisation at home, and can build bridges with our counterparts in challenging geopolitical contexts.</p> <p>As many EUA members host and support researchers with an at-risk background, this session will facilitate an exchange about institutional strategies and approaches, funding and cooperation opportunities, as well as lessons learnt and some of EUA's work in the field.</p>
	<p>Breakout session 2C Nurturing cooperative academic cultures in highly competitive environments</p> <p>Cooperation lies at the heart of academia and is central to universities' missions. Yet, in today's context of growing competition for students, funding, resources and prestige, how can we sustain meaningful and authentic cooperation? In other words, how can universities reconcile the values of collegiality and collective engagement with the pressures of competition?</p> <p>Building on EUA's work on academic careers and their assessment, this interactive fishbowl session invites participants to actively share their experiences and ideas, contributing to a collective reflection on how to foster cooperative academic cultures while remaining competitive.</p>
	<p>Breakout session 2D Policy update: the future of EU funding programmes</p> <p>Following the publication of the European Commission's proposals for the EU's next long-term budget in July 2025, this session will provide an update on the future of funding programmes for 2028–2034.</p> <p>With the EU institutions engaged in a crucial phase of the co-design process, participants will gain insights into the latest policy developments shaping Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, as well as the latter's relationship with the new European Competitiveness Fund. The session will also highlight EUA's advocacy efforts and outline the next steps.</p>
	<p>12.15-13.15</p> <p>Final plenary session Conference summary & closing</p>
	<p>13.15-14.30</p> <p>Lunch</p>

<p>14.30-16.15</p>	<p>Hot topic session Spotlight on Sustainability: taking stock of the SDGs and looking beyond 2030</p> <p>The UN's 2030 Agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is coming to an end.</p> <p>This agenda has mobilised universities across the world to work towards planetary and social sustainability. But it is now time to take stock and look forward to the next decades, a time that will be crucial for the future of humanity on planet Earth.</p> <p>Since last year's Annual Conference, EUA's Spotlight on Sustainability campaign has mapped and highlighted practices from universities across Europe. And over the past months, experts and leaders from EUA's members have worked towards a vision for universities' role beyond 2030.</p> <p><i>*While this session is separate to the conference programme and follows its official closing, it is open to conference participants at no extra charge. Participants can indicate interest in attending during the Annual Conference registration process.</i></p>
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