# European Universities Initiative – a Policy of Scientific Cooperation on the Basis of Transform4Europe and The 4EU+ Alliance

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**Abstract:**

The motivation for the analysis is the European Year of Skills 2023 announced by the European Commission. The main purpose of the article is to show the problems of the contemporary functioning of European science cooperation policy. Knowledge in a broad sense, including scientific and expert knowledge, is increasingly important in the process of political decision-making. The article presents the evolution of the approach and spread of the European Union's activity in the internal and external dimensions of its science policy. The authors analyzed the operational tools of European Union's (EU) scientific cooperation, which include the European Universities Initiative, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs. The following research methods were used to achieve this goal: case studies, statistical analysis and analysis of sources such as policy documents, normative acts, university rankings, available scientific literature and Internet sources. The subjects of the study are "European universities" – members of alliances: Transform4Europe and The 4 EU+ Alliance, subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis.

**Keywords:** science policy, European scientific cooperation, European Universities Initiative, European integration

## *Introduction*

The relationship between knowledge and policy is closely intertwined. This is particularly evident through mutual conditioning. In this case, both knowledge and access to it (or control of this access) are important determinants, tools of power, strength and influence, perpetration in micro, meso and macro-social relations. An entity that legitimizes itself by possessing knowledge or demonstrates an advantage in accessing it has a special ability and opportunity to induce, sustain, exacerbate the

disparities in potentials that exist among participants in international relations (Szkarłat et al., 2020).

The European Universities Initiative is a response to an idea put out by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 at the Sorbonne University. At the National Science Congress held at the time, he said, "I believe that we must create European Universities – networks of universities spread across Europe, in which each student's studies also mean studying abroad, in at least two languages. (...) We should make it our goal to establish at least twenty European Universities by 2024. However, we must start establishing the first of them as early as next academic year, along with real European semesters and real European degrees" (Bruno, 2017). Immediately after that, work began on starting preparations to sanction the existence of European Universities in the future. The European Universities Initiative was intended to be part of an overall vision to create a European Education Area by 2025. The European Council approved the initiative in December 2017. Finally, the realization of the notion of intensive cooperation in European higher education was accomplished through the European Commission's first "European Universities" competition. This article focuses on evaluating the European Universities Initiative through an analysis of two selected alliances: Transform4Europe (T4E): European University for Knowledge Entrepreneurs and the 4EU+ Alliance. Moreover, this article describes the history of the two alliances, participation in the development of European higher education and scientific cooperation, the goals of the activities, the prospects for their development and an assessment of the scale of innovation.

*Policy of scientific cooperation – theoretical aspects*

Building scientific capacity by integrating the European education area, adjusting priorities and achieving goals arising from the Bologna process or the renewal of the European Union's agenda for higher education is directly visible on several levels.

The primary goal of the innovations being introduced in higher education is to increase the level of education of European citizens and develop their sense of belonging to the European Union. This is done by increasing the mobility of students and teachers, including by encouraging academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, promoting cooperation between educational institutions, or developing the exchange of information and experience on issues common to the educational systems of member states. On the other hand, the European Union, through such collegiality of activities, is positioning itself competitively on the international stage,

where internal scientific cooperation is transforming into scientific diplomacy (Ryniejska-Kiełdanowicz, 2019).

Science diplomacy is a relatively new concept that is gaining considerable traction at the end of the second decade of the 21st century. These are activities carried out by the foreign policy, science and innovation policies of a state or international organizations. In 2012, the European Commission's policy document, namely the Communication from the Commission to the EP, the Council and the Committees, entitled "Developing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: a strategic approach (EC 2012c)" used the term «science diplomacy» for the first time, which was characterized as "International cooperation in research and innovation, which will become an instrument of soft power used in «science diplomacy», as well as a mechanism for improving relations with key countries and regions". Good international relations can, in turn, facilitate effective cooperation in research and innovation" (European Commission, 2012).

European Union scientific cooperation is understood as a separate policy area within the framework of European integration, which was established by the Single European Act adopted in 1986. Specific reference is made to Title XIX of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, "Research and technological development and space". This prerogative is further defined by Articles 179, 181 and 182 of the TFEU. Nevertheless, Article 180 is also relevant, which specifies how the European Union will pursue the goals of creating a European Research Area.

"In pursuit of these objectives, the Union shall carry out the following activities in addition to those undertaken by the Member States:

A. the execution of research, technological development and demonstration programs, together with the promotion of cooperation with and between companies, research centers and universities

B. promoting cooperation in the field of EU research, technological development and demonstration with third countries and international organizations

C. disseminating and optimizing the results of activities in the field of EU research, technological development and demonstration

D. stimulating the training and mobility of researchers in the Union" (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2009).

The creation of strong scientific centers, in addition to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and attractiveness of higher education, creates strong think tanks, expert bases that are able to support the European Union's actions in responding to crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, the EU's science diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by a set of actions directed inside and outside the Union (Szkarłat, 2022).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of internal and external European scientific cooperation

| Internal scientific cooperation of the European Union | External scientific cooperation of the European Union |
|---|---|
| Cooperative nature (no element of rivalry, effective coordination of all actions taken to achieve the most beneficial effect for the cooperators) | Cooperative and competitive nature (use to solve global problems, establish cooperation in times of conflict, support European Union crisis management and peace building efforts) |
| It should be characterized as a "win-win" relationship | It should not be characterized as a "win-win" relationship |
| Access to an attractive offer of scientific cooperation in the European Union is based on the principle of conditionality, related, for example, to the fulfillment of the treaty values of the European Union, such as the rule of law | Access to an attractive offer of scientific cooperation with the European Union is based on the principle of conditionality of meeting certain expectations related, for example, to security issues or the political system of the country |
| Integrating the European model of education | Exporting the European education model |
| Strengthen its own potential by creating a coherent area of education and European research space with an innovative, globally competitive and attractive character, creating its own qualified personnel | Strengthening its own potential at the expense of others, "importing" the brightest minds and talents |
| Integration within the European Union structures | Establish and sustain interstate relations with non-European Union entities |

*Source: own elaboration.*

All of these factors create opportunities to join partners with advanced science and innovation sectors, create access to their research facilities, technologies, human resources or sources of funding for scientific endeavors. Moreover, such activities increase the attractiveness of states or non-state actors, such as the European Union, and create an image of a reliable partner in the external arena. In this way, competition for access to research funding and disparities in the level of scientific and technological advancement are disappearing within the European community.

*The characteristics of strategic partnerships*

Mobility is one of the main objectives of the European Union's education and training policy and a significant factor in the development of the European higher education area. In addition to providing an opportunity for students to gain experience in an international environment, the European Universities Initiative is a program that aims to transform European regions. Universities are becoming centers of intense impact on the spaces in which they are located. Among other things, by creating and implementing smarter knowledge ecosystems focused on transforming regions into climate-neutral areas with thriving economies. The innovative knowledge transfer models developed at Transform4Europe and 4EU+ will be implementable by universities interested in supporting local entrepreneurship. All this takes place on an individual-European level partnership. The primary goal of T4E and 4EU+ is to educate Europeans who will have the necessary knowledge to actively participate in the processes of transformation. Thus enhancing the potential of the European Union as a whole.

*Transform4Europe program*

The Transform4Europe alliance, which is part of the so-called "second wave of European universities" marked in 2020, initially brought together seven members: Saarland University in Germany (coordinating institution - leader), the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland), the University of Alicante (Spain), the University of Trieste (Italy), Sofia's "St. Kliment Ohridski" University and the Academy of Fine Arts in Tallinn. The highest decision-making body is the Board of Directors, which includes the rectors of all member universities and two student representatives. Each vote has equal value. The board approves the proposed strategy of activities and can make modifications to the previously adopted assumptions. Key issues in specific thematic areas are discussed at meetings of three executive committees, which are divided into:

- Mobility for All and Multilingual Campus T4E;
- Innovative teaching and study programs;
- Knowledge entrepreneurship and regional impact (Kwiatosz, 2021).

The above-mentioned committees are primarily responsible for organizing educational processes and proposing solutions in specific areas of cooperation. They are mainly composed of

pro-rectors of universities. The results of the work of these committees are presented to the Board of Directors.

Transform4Europe's expansion is taking place intensively and on multiple levels. This is evident recently through the fourth call for proposals launched by the European Commission to support European university alliances. The project, which was submitted to the competition by the T4E consortium in January 2023, envisaged, in addition to the integration of new institutions, the creation of a new organization and intensified cooperation between members around common goals. Another example of action is the decision taken at the T4E "executive board" meeting held in Saarbrücken on November 9, 2022, where the T4E European University formalized its expansion to include Mariupol State University in Ukraine as an affiliated institution. This allows Ukrainian students and university staff to participate in virtual exchanges and, where possible, inpatient exchanges. On June 27, 2023, the European Commission approved the project proposed by T4E in a competition, thereby supporting the initiative for another four years. At the same time, funding of €14.4 million from the Erasmus+ program was allocated. As a result, three more universities joined the consortium as full members: the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Portugal, the Primorska University in Copra, Slovenia, and France's Jean Monnet University in Saint-Étienne. As it stands now, the T4E consortium is made up of ten universities with diverse scientific potential (see *Table 2*).

Transform4Europe has established the Transform4European Research and Innovation subproject (T4ERI), which is funded under the EU's Horizon 2020 program (Framework Program for Research and Innovation 2014-2022) to transform "the European Union into a center of excellence and knowledge" with a budget of €80 billion and The goal of T4ERI is to develop a common research and innovation strategy: together the partners want to create structures, exploit synergies and expand areas of excellence. In addition to a common research and innovation agenda, joint strategies are being developed to attract and retain outstanding researchers and open up science to all members of the T4E regions. In close cooperation with regional players from business and industry, culture, politics and civil society, research and innovation are being promoted to pave the way for the future European university. The European Union now has a new program called "Horizon Europe" (Framework Program for Research and Innovation 2021-2027) with a budget of as much as €95.5 billion and with the first strategic plan for 2021–2024 (European Commission,

2021). This document lists the People's Republic of China, India, Japan and South Korea as strategic partners.

The integration of EU educational programs can be rated very highly, mainly because they have multi-level synergies. In "Horizon Europe", it can be found that the program supports Erasmus+ and 17 other programs of a scientific cooperation nature. This reinforces synergies at two levels. The first is the compatibility level, where harmonization of funding rules, flexible funding schemes and pooling of resources at the EU level are implemented. The second level is coherence and complementarity, i.e. the mutual alignment of strategic priorities to support the realization of a common vision. The European Universities Initiative is funded by the Erasmus+ program, and the Erasmus+ program is funded by the record-breaking Horizon Europe program, thus demonstrating that not only does the European Union devote such a large amount of resources to science in its broadest sense, it is also steadily increasing funding for research and innovation projects (compared to Horizon 2020, this is an increase of €15.5 billion).

According to the data in *Table 2. Information about the universities belonging to the Transform4Europe alliance*, the characteristic factor that describes the universities affiliated with the consortium is the relatively short period of activity. Almost all the universities (except University of Sofia) were founded in the 20th century, and more than half around the second half of the 20th century and beyond. This may translate into several important values. First and foremost, it translates into experience and traditions. Universities that do not have a long history and tradition may have little experience in conducting and improving education, developing curricula and implementing innovative teaching processes. Younger universities often have no established reputations and few connections with employers and the scientific community.

Second are financial resources, younger universities may have less capital, which prevents them from investing in infrastructure, equipment, research and attracting outstanding faculty. This can result in poorer conditions for students and lower tuition. Third are accreditations and rankings – younger universities are less appreciated by accrediting bodies, which affects their credibility and prestige. However, it is worth noting that younger universities can also achieve a high level of quality (University of Alicante), and age is not the only factor affecting accreditations and rankings (University of Sofia). Finally, there are alumni networks, where younger universities tend to have a less extensive alumni network, which can adversely affect employment opportunities for students and prevent the building of professional contacts and relationships.

Table 2. Information on universities belonging to the Transform4Europe program

| University | Year of establishment | Number of students | Scientific offerings | Place in the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022 | Place in the World University Ranking 2022 | Scientific potential overall (0-100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Saarland University | 1948 | ≈ 17,000 | more than 100-degree programs at UG and PG level in 8 different subject areas running under 6 dedicated faculties | 501-600 | not included | n/a |
| University of Alicante | 1979 | ≈ 30,000 | the university offers courses in more than 50 degrees | 601-700 | >2,100 | 10.6-22.3 |
| Estonian Academy of Arts | 1914 | ≈ 1,100 | over 30 curricula in the four faculties of Architecture, Design, Art Culture and Fine Arts, 10 of them international and fully taught in English language | >1000 | not included | n/a |
| Universidade Católica Portuguesa | 1967 | ≈ 12,000 | 35 undergraduate and 66 masters | >1000 | not included | n/a |
| University of Primorska | 2003 | ≈ 6,000 | 32 undergraduate, 37 masters and 16 study programs in English language | >1000 | 1001–1200 | 22.4-27.1 |
| Jean Monnet University | 1969 | ≈ 20,000 | 105 courses that fall into 4 different degrees | >1000 | 1201+ | 10.6-22.3 |
| University of Silesia in Katowice | 1968 | ≈ 21,000 | over 70 programs and over 200 specializations in Art, Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science, IT, and Technology | >1000 | 1201+ | 10.6-22.3 |
| Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" | 1888 | ≈ 22,000 | over 80 undergraduate programs and over 130 masters | >1000 | 1201+ | 10.6-22.3 |
| The University of Trieste | 1924 | ≈ 16,000 | 63 courses, divided into bachelor's and master's degree courses, PhD and specialization schools | 601-700 | 501-600 | 38.1-40.8 |
| Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas | 1922 | ≈ 9,000 | 17 undergraduate programs, 16 masters | >1000 | 1201+ | 10.6-22.3 |

*Sources: university official websites, World University Rankings 2022, Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022.*

In this case, the T4E program, through the financing of activities from European funds, does not only eliminate the differences between the consortium universities, moreover – it creates a new brand of European Universities, which increases the prestige and reputation of the universities, as well as create conditions for improving the educational offer and unifying it to a similar level as those in scientific centers that are stronger. Cooperation between universities facilitates the development of new technological solutions that can be used both in the teaching process and in research. The T4E consortium helps universities to build a stronger position in the education market and compete with their competitors (from outside the European Union), this is of great importance, especially after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. Cooperation at the European level can increase the competitiveness of European universities on the international stage, attracting students and researchers from other regions of the world. In this way, T4E is pursuing the community goal of boosting economic growth in Europe through innovation.

*4EU+ Alliance program*

In March 2018, the University of Warsaw, along with three other prestigious European universities – Charles University (Czech Republic), Sorbonne University (France), and Heidelberg University (Germany) – joined hands in a formal agreement to create a European University Alliance. In the fall of 2018, the alliance was expanded to include two additional universities: University of Copenhagen (Denmark) and University of Milan (Italy). This transformed the previous alliance called 4EU into a more comprehensive initiative called 4EU+. The six participating institutions formally agreed to work together, signing a Memorandum of Understanding and approved a Mission Statement. On August 1, 2022, the University of Geneva joined the program and less than a year later – on July 1, 2023 – the University of Paris-Panthéon-Assas joined the 4EU+ Alliance. Expanding the alliance's offerings by adding new educational centers underscores just how important a role it plays in the development of education. In its current form, the 4EU+ is a partnership of universities from four countries and three cultural centers in Europe.

As of June 2019, the 4EU+ Alliance is one of the university alliances funded under the Erasmus+ "European Universities" pilot program. Out of 54 applications received, 17 European universities were selected, covering 114 higher education institutions from 24 member states. Each alliance received a total of up to €85 million in funding. Within the first three years, each alliance received up to €5 million to begin implementing its plans.

Since its inception, the 4EU+ Alliance has had as its main goal the educational mobility of employees, students and doctoral students. In addition to traditional study trips – mainly related to the Erasmus+ program – 4EU+ offers many short-term visits (related to participation in seminars or summer schools).

Currently, the alliance offers four leading projects: One Comprehensive Research-Intensive European University, Transforming ReseArch & INnovation agendas and support in the Alliance, 4EU+ Visiting Professorships and SEED4EU+. The first two are strictly alliance projects and focus on university collaboration to create the best possible teaching practices. 1CORE is a project in which participants seek to deepen a multidimensional student-centered approach and develop a new common digital infrastructure and services, with a view to further improving the existing governance and management framework. The TRAIN4EU+ initiative aims to discover and exchange exemplary models, practices, methodologies, and firsthand encounters to enable researchers and administrative personnel to mutually enrich their knowledge and skills within the alliance universities and departments. The other two projects fall into the category of collaborative projects. The main objective of the 4EU+ Visiting Professorships aims to foster the development of new collaborations and enrich existing ones. Visiting Professorship projects are designed to involve not only staff members, but also students and doctoral candidates from both the host university and the home university of the Visiting Professorship holder. SEED4EU+ is an open call program that embodies the comprehensive vision of the 4EU+ Alliance, aiming to integrate and advance all aspects of the member universities' missions. Through this initiative, the academic community is offered the opportunity to financially support and nurture innovative initiatives that may not fit within the confines of conventional project proposals. Furthermore, an important piece of information in assessing the quality and innovativeness of the projects is the fact that two of them received grants in competitions – Transforming ReseArch & INnovation agendas and support in 4EU (TRAIN4EU+) in the Horizon 2020 "Science with and for Society" competition, and One Comprehensive Research European University (1CORE) funding in the "European Universities" competition, organized by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ program.

Referring to full-time or online classes within the program – the study paths offered within the university created by the 4EU+ are flexible. The program of studies is correlated with the traditional division into scientific disciplines. The offer includes a breakdown of classes available for each level of education, in 7 European languages. Four flagships are promoted: Urban Health

and Demographic Change; Europeanness: multilingualism, pluralities, citizenship; Digitisation –
Modelling - Transformation, Environmental transitions.

Table 3. Information on universities belonging to the 4UE+ Alliance.

| University | Year of establishment | Number of students | Scientific offerings | Place in the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022 | Place in the World University Rankings 2022 | Scientific potential overall (0-100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Charles University | 1348 | ≈ 50,000 | 600 accredited degree programs in 630 fields | 301-400 | 501-600 | 38.1-40.8 |
| Heidelberg University | 1386 | ≈ 30,000 | over 160 fields of study | 70 | 42 | 73.6 |
| Sorbonne University | re-established in 2018 | ≈ 57,000 | wide choice of courses, in the arts, humanities, science and engineering, in addition to medical and paramedical degrees | 43 | 88 | 63.6 |
| Paris-Panthéon-Assas University | 1970 | ≈ 30,000 | 8 programs taught in English and 10 programs taught in French | >1000 | 601-800 | 32.0-37.9 |
| University of Copenhagen | 1479 | ≈ 37,000 | over 200 academic programs | 39 | 96 | 62.7 |
| University of Geneva | 1559 | ≈ 19,000 | more than 500 programs and 343 continuing education programs | 62 | 197 | 54 |
| University of Milan | 1924 | ≈ 64,000 | 140 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and 65+ Specialization Schools | 151-200 | 301-350 | 46.1-48.0 |
| University of Warsaw | 1816 | ≈ 36,000 | over 300 programs of 1st, 2nd and long cycle | 401-500 | 601-800 | 32.0-37.9 |

*Sources: university official websites, World University Rankings 2022, Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022.*

According to the data in *Table 3. Information on universities belonging to the 4UE+
Alliance*, the similarity of characteristics of the 4EU+ universities comes to the fore. These are

universities with a well-established tradition and history, which have been training qualified personnel for years and have set their sights on developing as research centers. The two oldest universities – Charles University and Heidelberg University – have been in operation for more than 200 years. Sorbonne University is a scientific center that also has a long educational culture, as it was founded at the very beginning of the 13th century with the emergence of the *universitas magistrorum and scholarium Parisiensis*. However, through reforms, the university in its current form has only been operating since 2018.

The centers converge in size – looking at the ratio of the country's density to the approximate number of students. In addition, each university offers courses of study in the native language of the individual as well as English. This raises the idea that each university is investing in expanding its offerings for foreign students and encouraging education in the country.

Moreover, the table also emphasizes the important difference in terms of international visibility – through the ranking and research potential of allied universities. This is the ratio of the four universities in the initial ranking list to the four scientific centers performing on average. It stresses the differences observed among European countries and sub-regions, as well as existing structural disparities in European higher education systems, calling for the urgent need to achieve greater balance in access to quality education. This represents a key step toward fostering social and economic growth while strengthening Europe's collective identity.

The geographical distribution of the universities participating in the alliance is also worth noting. The universities are located in all four European subregions and play a key role as regional flagship universities: Western Europe (Heidelberg, French universities, Geneva), the Nordic countries (Copenhagen), Central Europe (Charles and Warsaw) and Southern Europe (Milan). The presence of universities across all four macro-regions of Europe demonstrates their strategic locations as testing grounds for implementing macro-regional strategies that span national borders. This geographic distribution develops the transformative potential to influence European higher education and foster closer integration among European nations.

The alliances involve completely different educational centers – Transform4Europe is dominated by universities with smaller student populations, whose international visibility and research potential is relatively low relative to other universities around the world. And The 4EU+ Alliance is a program that, compared to T4E, has fewer participants, however they are definitely

larger research centers. In addition, they concentrate on universities whose scientific potential can be described as medium or high.

The alliances are in a different stage of project development – Transform4Europe joined in the second wave of European universities, while The 4EU+ Alliance appeared in the first wave. However, this in no way limits the even development of the two programs. Both work closely with significant players from the global arena of business, politics and culture.

Geographic distribution is a point of commonality with both programs, as T4E as well as The 4EU+ do not focus on one region of Europe – they care about creating access to quality education in every region of the continent. It is worth pointing out that we care not only about the development of the countries of the European Union, but the whole of Europe. T4E is available to Ukraine, creating an extraordinary opportunity for students from that country to gain knowledge and help unite the entire continent, providing a high level of education in underdeveloped countries in Europe. And in the ranks of 4EU+ is a university from Switzerland.

Both alliances have as their overarching goals, enabling cross-border cooperation and promoting European unity. The actions they are taking in this regard are intended to help combat challenges in European higher education.

### *Benefits and assumptions*

The integration of mobility initiatives in higher education has become an integral feature of the globalized academic landscape. Europe's most popular study abroad program, Erasmus+, has given rise to the development of initiatives such as Transform4Europe and The 4EU+ Alliance. Educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the immense value of facilitating international experiences for their students and employees. By participating in the programs, students have the opportunity to gain exposure to different teaching methodologies – this broadens their horizons and supports the development of their competencies.

Cross-border partnerships and cooperation between institutions lead to an increase in innovative activities and the use of different perspectives to achieve increasingly modern solutions. In today's rapidly changing world, education systems must constantly evolve to meet the needs of students, address emerging challenges and take advantage of new opportunities. These initiatives contribute to the international reputation and attractiveness of educational institutions, providing a competitive edge in the higher education market.

*Mission and vision of the Transform4Europe program*

The objective of Transform4Europe is to create a sustainable alliance that prepares for social transformation through the concept of knowledge-based entrepreneurship, while being an attractive player in the European educational field. The ten partner universities form a pan-European reference point for the knowledge and innovation ecosystems of the participating regions to promote the strengthening of the European higher education field. In addition, an important goal is to further develop degree offerings by integrating a challenge-based approach and innovative teaching standards, with a strong focus on lifelong learning, joint degrees and mutual recognition under T4E. The three main thematic areas targeted by T4E are:

- Digital transformation and smart regions;
- Ecological transformation and sustainable development;
- Social transformation, community building and integration.

Transform4Europe European University aims to develop institutional and strategic cooperation in training and research based on shared values and principles. T4E European University's members are united by strong commitments, in particular to the creation of a multi-campus, educational innovation and the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, and even a common language policy to promote the languages and cultures of the territories they represent.

*Mission and vision of the 4EU+ Alliance program*

In the 4EU+ Mission Statement, allies highlight the changes that have taken place in European history that have significantly shaped Europe – citing the contemporary political crises through which the post-war social contract began to crumble. They also highlight the impact of Brexit and the rise of social media as significant factors in shaping knowledge acquisition. Climate change and artificial intelligence are also cited as making major contributions to the perception of the meaning of existence. Universities in the alliance list two main thrusts to emphasize responsibility in building accountability and the need to shape a new approach: guiding our students who gain knowledge to build a better future; supporting our scientists who continue to expand the frontiers of knowledge and ensuring that this knowledge helps society meet the challenges of our time.

Two main goals come to the forefront of making sense of the formation of the alliance: maintaining unity in diversity and taking care to shape the future of students. As leading institutions in the countries, the units have a responsibility to disseminate knowledge and innovative pedagogical approaches. The mission includes elem to foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of European culture and history within our national educational systems. In addition, the centers strive to maintain Europe's position as a key reference point in education, research, knowledge and technology transfer.

Educational development is aided by the fact of institutional similarities and the level of related research cooperation. That is why the universities have decided to create three key challenges in education, research and technology transfer that they address:

- Boost meaningful mobility;
- Develop a common challenge-based framework for education;
- Increase inclusiveness and balance at a European level.

"Together, we aim to create a truly integrated European University System by 2025. We will empower students, researchers and society as a whole, as we strive to address the great social challenges of our time, from social inequality and the value of knowledge to climate change and the impact of artificial intelligence. We will train critically thinking, fully competent citizens who embrace European values." (4EU+ Mission Statement, 2019). The assumptions of the alliance are created to meet the development and needs of the rapid development of the world, especially the technology of the 21st century.

The assumptions of the alliances fulfill the goals and are in line with the values of the European Union, especially equality. Solidarity in the education context refers to the principle of mutual support, cooperation, and inclusivity within the educational system. Allied's belief is based on an awareness of the need to ensure equal access to quality education and opportunities for personal growth for every student. This is to contribute to building a strong European community – not only in educational terms. Both alliances emphasize the importance of introduction and teaching in line with rapid technological development.

*Summary*

European Universities are transnational alliances that pretend to be the universities of the future – promoting European values and identity and revolutionizing the quality and competitiveness of European higher education. The initiative offers various opportunities to support cooperation models for European educational centers through Erasmus+ calls for proposals. Alliances that are examples of such initiatives are: 4EU+ and T4E. They play a significant role in shaping a more informed community about the importance of education. These programs contribute to uniting Europe in diversity and provide a wide range of educational opportunities for program beneficiaries, which is linked to the EU's goals and values.

As highlighted in the analysis, the compared alliances bring together quite different universities – T4E is an alliance of 10 smaller universities with lower international visibility, 4EU+ is an alliance of 8 universities with larger student numbers and medium to high academic potential. The issue that arises here is that of juxtaposing universities and matching each other on similarities of potential, rather than seeking to average it out – i.e. combining universities with the highest scientific potential according to the ranking with those with both average and lowest potential.

Figure 1. The number of universities in the Top 100.
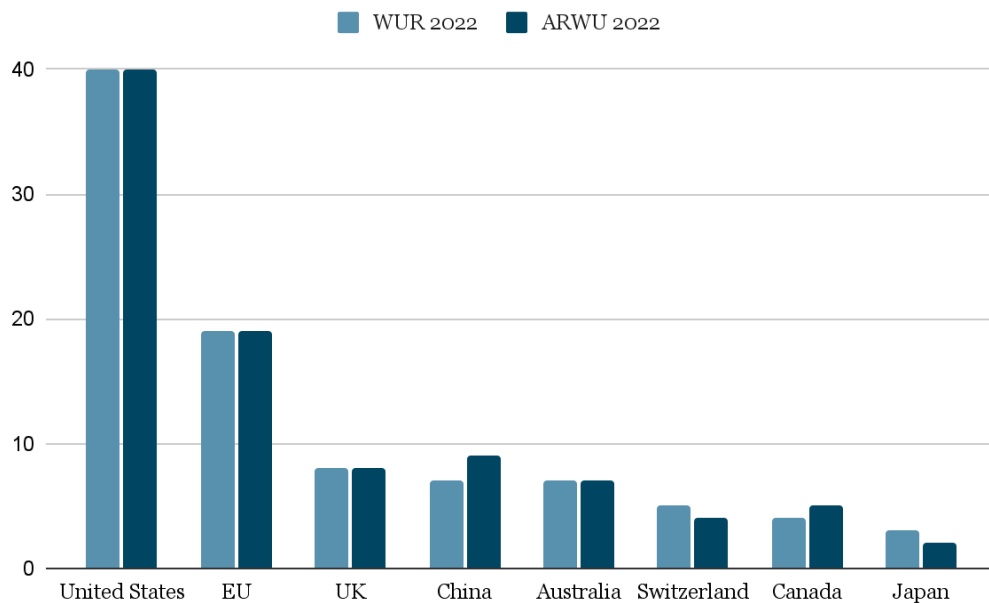


*Sources: World University Rankings 2022, Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022.*

As can be seen from *Figure 1. The number of Universities in the Top 10*0 and the findings presented during the study, EU universities have the potential to claim high places in the global ranking. However, it is currently universities in the US that are gaining top rankings. According to the World University Rankings 2022, the top 40 universities are from the US, 19 from the EU, 8 from the UK, 7 from China, 7 from Australia, 5 from Switzerland, 4 from Canada and 3 from Japan. The difference with the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2022 is in the appearance of more Chinese universities - 9 and fewer in Switzerland – 4 and Japan – 2.

The desire to make universities educational centers with even better scientific facilities requires current and potential allies to create and share good practices within programs. By creating and drawing on the existing experience of allies, Europe can gain innovative science centers and high-quality researchers.

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