

The future of European universities, a core ambition for the French Presidency of the EU in 2022

Speech by Manuel Bouard, representative of the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, at the occasion of the UNIVERSEH inaugural conference in Toulouse, on 4 October 2021.

Dear members of parliaments, dear members of Universeh, dear stakeholders,

On behalf of Minister Frédérique Vidal, I would like first of all to thank Mr Raimbault for inviting me to this conference, dedicated to the launch of the UNIVERSEH alliance, both its training and R&I parts.

The European universities initiative, to which France is particularly attached, was put forward by the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron. It represents more than a promise: it is a major turning point for the future of the European higher education, research and innovation area.

The changes and innovation that this dynamic will bring are crucial to train future generations of Europeans and significantly increase Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness on a global scale. This is particularly accurate in the field of space!

Today, 41 pilot projects are testing new models of cooperation, governance, training, research and innovation. These alliances involve more than 280 higher education institutions, which represents nearly 20% of all students in Europe. They mobilize more than 1000 associated partners from Europe and elsewhere: institutions, research centers, companies, regions, etc.

The enthusiasm for this initiative remains intact among higher education, research and innovation stakeholders and its impact is growing: the COVID pandemic has acted as a catalyst for alliances, encouraging institutions to further strengthen their ties and accelerate their cooperation. The coming period, with the new EU budget and national recovery plans, will help consolidating these European universities, which, together with European research infrastructures, constitute the most tangible evidence of our European higher education, research and innovation area. Over twenty countries, including France, have chosen to provide financial support to their institutions, in addition to Erasmus+ and the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. In the French case, we're bringing 100 million euros over 10 years.

But, as we are celebrating the launch of this alliance, we are already thinking about what comes next, as soon as next year! Our take on the future of the initiative is as simple as that: empower the alliances to deepen their collaboration, let them show us that the model works, and contribute to the transformation of higher education in Europe. If this means add new partners, fine. If this means consolidating local ecosystems, disseminating good practices and resources, fine as well!

In the field of higher education and R&I, the issue of the future of the European universities will be at the core of our ambitions for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022, with three key words: recovery, power, belonging. We are considering the following priorities:

1. Going deeper into the implementation of the " knowledge square " combining higher education, research, innovation and services to society. The challenge will be to work on several concrete objects illustrating the synergies between these components, with in particular the European strategy for universities, citizen involvement in missions and a European initiative on innovation ecosystems.
2. We will also prepare the next steps for the full roll out of the European universities, in order to deepen the sense of belonging to the European project. We will contribute to providing a

framework for the deployment of these new players on the European higher education and R&I landscape. We will in particular focus on the research component of the alliances, and also pave the way towards European degrees and possible dedicated statute, striving to make it possible to jointly recruit researchers and teachers or to set up joint laboratories.

3. Finally, but not least, we'll take over the work on the new international strategy for cooperation in higher education and R&I. Our aim is to build on the momentum reached with the fresh conclusions adopted on Tuesday in order to launch a new multilateral dialogue for cooperation.

A large number of high-level events will take place in France in order to illustrate these priorities, such as the « Forum of Universities for the future of Europe », that will take place in Paris on the 26th January 2022. This forum will constitute a milestone for building a shared ambition between stakeholders, Member states and the EU on the future of higher education and in particular the European universities initiative.

Thank you for your attention.