



STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

**Research,
the European**

INGENIUM
European University

**Education and
University**

**Alliances should be at the Heart of Europe's
Competitiveness and Resilience**

To: Members of the European Parliament — in particular the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT); the Council of the European Union; the European Commission; and the Member States of the European Union.

The INGENIUM European University

INGENIUM is a European University Alliance of ten universities across Spain, Romania, Italy, Ireland, Finland, Germany, France, Sweden, Bulgaria and Greece, co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-EUR-UNIV-2, No. 101090042). Together, we serve more than 200,000 students and staff and operate as an integrated transnational campus delivering joint education, collaborative research, challenge-based mobility and shared innovation with our regional ecosystems.

We endorse the Joint Statement of 7 April 2026 by the German Rectors' Conference, France Universités, Universities of the Netherlands, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland, the Flemish Interuniversity Council, the Rectors' Council of the French-speaking universities of Belgium, and the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities, and we add our voice to the calls of the FOREU4ALL coalition of European University Alliances. We urge the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission to act firmly in order to safeguard the foundations of European competitiveness and resilience.

A decisive moment for the European higher education sector

Europe can no longer take its geopolitical environment, its partnerships or its security for granted. Knowledge and research capacity are increasingly treated as strategic assets, contested in a time of geopolitical tension and economic competition, while polarised public discourse weakens democratic standards and academic freedom. No Member State can address today's scientific, technological and societal challenges alone. As the Union prepares the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the successor to Horizon Europe (FP10), the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), the European Research Area (ERA) Act and the future Erasmus+ programme, the choices made in the coming months will determine Europe's capacity to act collectively and to compete in an increasingly fragmented world.

European University Alliances such as INGENIUM are a structural answer to this challenge. We connect higher education, research, innovation and regional ecosystems across borders; we attract and retain talent; and we deliver tangible European cooperation in the everyday experience of students, staff and partners. To deliver on the high expectations placed on the Alliances, we need long-term, predictable funding mechanisms aligned with the missions assigned to us.

Preserve a clear legal basis for higher education in the European Competitiveness Fund

The European Competitiveness Fund is a strategic opportunity to align Europe's industrial ambition with the skills, talent and innovation capacity required to deliver it. The Commission's original proposal recognised this in Recital 21 and Article 30, which provide the legal basis for ECF support to skills development, public-private partnerships between universities, vocational education and training providers, applied research and businesses, and the activities of European University Alliances.

Without a clear reference to higher education in the regulation, ECF funding for skills, scholarships in strategic fields, or Alliance activities cannot be securely deployed and would be exposed to legal challenge. The reports by Mario Draghi and Enrico Letta have made plain that Europe's competitiveness gap is increasingly driven by shortages of highly skilled labour and by insufficient alignment between industrial policy, innovation systems and education. Investment in strategic sectors must be accompanied by investment in skills, talent development and structured cooperation between higher education, research and industry. Deleting these provisions would create a structural disconnect between the ECF's investments and the availability of the talent needed to absorb them, undermining the Fund's own objectives.

This is particularly critical for an Alliance such as INGENIUM. Our ten universities are deeply rooted in their cities and regions — from Asturias and Iași to Abruzzo, the South-West of Ireland, South Karelia, Baden-Württemberg, Normandy, Västra Götaland, Sofia and Crete. We are part of the productive tissue of those regions, embedded in their innovation ecosystems, and connected through long-standing partnerships with local SMEs, industry, public authorities and civil society. Regional universities of this kind are precisely where ECF investments translate into the skills pipelines, applied research and public-private partnerships that strategic sectors need to absorb capital and turn it into competitiveness. They are also where talent is retained against the gravitational pull of larger metropolitan hubs, anchoring innovation across the whole of the Union and supporting territorial cohesion. An ECF without a clear legal basis for higher education and University Alliances would cut precisely this connective tissue. This would result in leaving regional ecosystems under-resourced and weakening the Fund's reach where it is most needed.

INGENIUM therefore calls on the European Parliament to:

- **Retain Recital 21** of the ECF Regulation, including its provisions on skills intelligence, upskilling and reskilling, public-private partnerships and the activities of University Alliances;
- **Preserve Article 30** of the ECF Regulation on support for skills development, including the European Skills Guarantee and structured cooperation between higher education, vocational education and training, applied research and business;
- At a minimum, ensure a robust compromise text that secures a legal basis for higher education and European University Alliances within the ECF, enabling support for flagship initiatives such as scholarships in strategic fields and Alliance activities.

We further call on the Council and the Member States to support the inclusion of higher education and the European University Alliances in the ECF's scope, recognising that strategic investment in higher education is a precondition for translating industrial policy into competitiveness and innovation outcomes.

Match Europe's ambition with the budgets it requires: Erasmus+ and FP10

Erasmus+ has become one of the most tangible symbols of Europe for millions of students and staff, and the indispensable backbone for the European University Alliances. Over successive Multiannual Financial Frameworks, the share allocated to higher education within Erasmus+ has declined from 44% to 33%, and current discussions on the 2028–2034 period point to an overall envelope significantly below the level needed to maintain existing activities, let alone to absorb new initiatives under the Union of Skills. Without additional resources, this trajectory will force reductions in cooperation projects, in long-term mobility schemes such as KA131 and KA171, and in flagship initiatives including the European Universities Initiative.

Mobility and exchange are not only a vehicle for skills: they foster critical thinking, intercultural understanding and a lived experience of European citizenship that cannot be obtained within a single country. They are an investment in the cohesion and resilience of European society.

The next Framework Programme for research and innovation must, in turn, remain well funded, autonomous and firmly anchored in excellence, with ample room for fundamental research alongside applied and policy-driven activities, and with the social sciences and humanities as an integral part of collaborative ecosystems. FP10 must remain shaped, governed and operated by the research and innovation community, while the ECF translates innovations into concrete applications. The two instruments should reinforce one another; the ECF should not subsume FP10, nor should it be used to compensate for under-investment elsewhere.

INGENIUM therefore calls on the institutions and the Member States to:

- **Commit to a budget of €220 billion for FP10 and €60 billion for Erasmus+** in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, in line with the call from European rectors' conferences;

- **Secure, as an absolute minimum, an Erasmus+ budget of €47 billion with fixed sectoral allocations of at least 33% for higher education**, and refrain from introducing costly new initiatives unless accompanied by additional, dedicated funding;
- Develop long-term, predictable funding mechanisms for the European University Alliances, recognising their structural role in deepening the European Education Area, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.

Reaffirm openness, academic freedom and international collaboration in the ERA Act

Excellence, creativity and innovation depend on the free movement of researchers, students and ideas across borders, on academic freedom, and on trust-based international cooperation, including with associated and partner countries beyond the EU. While research security and European economic sovereignty are vital, they must be addressed in ways that preserve collaboration as a core objective rather than displacing it.

INGENIUM calls on the EU institutions to ensure that the ERA Act strengthens mutual trust between Member States, reduces structural barriers to cooperation, protects researchers' ability to work freely across borders, and realises a genuine "fifth freedom" for knowledge, reinforcing existing instruments and national legislation rather than adding administrative complexity.

Our call

Europe must treat knowledge as a strategic asset while also recognising its intrinsic value. Investing in research, education and mobility is key to safeguard autonomy and technological leadership, and to ensure that scientific advancement continues to generate societal benefits. The decisions taken in the weeks ahead on the ECF Regulation, on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and on Erasmus+, FP10 and the ERA Act will signal whether Europe is willing to match its ambition with the means to achieve it.

We, the ten universities of the INGENIUM Alliance, stand ready to contribute to a Europe that is competitive, resilient, open and democratic. We urge the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Member States to act accordingly, and without delay.

The INGENIUM European University Alliance

Universidad de Oviedo (UNIOVI, Spain) · Universitatea Tehnică "Gheorghe Asachi" din Iași (TUIASI, Romania) · Università degli Studi "Gabriele d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara (UdA, Italy) · Munster Technological University (MTU, Ireland) · South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK, Finland) · Hochschule Karlsruhe (HKA, Germany) · Université de Rouen Normandie (URN, France) · University of Skövde (HIS, Sweden) · Medical University of Sofia (MUS, Bulgaria) · University of Crete (UoC, Greece)

