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Joint Mission Statement for CIVIS2

(Approved by the Board of Rectors of CIVIS on 11-02-2022)

The CIVIS Alliance brings together 10 publicly funded, comprehensive research-intensive universities that offer cutting-edge education and is strategically linked to several African partners. Our shared agenda is motivated by an awareness of the many challenges facing society today in the areas of the environment and climate change, health care, democracy and cultural heritage, sustainable and inclusive mobility, and digital transformations. Because these urgent challenges require rapid decisions based on scientific evidence, universities must join forces and invest in inter-institutional and interdisciplinary cooperation to educate the coming generation of citizens of Europe. This is what we seek to facilitate by deepening our alliance’s structural collaborations.

The 10 universities committed to joining forces to consolidate a structural European University Alliance under the name “CIVIS” are located across Europe: Aix-Marseille Université (Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles, France), National Kapodistrian University of Athens (Athens, Greece), Université libre de Bruxelles (Brussels, Belgium), Universitatea din București (Bucharest, Romania), University of Glasgow (Glasgow, Scotland), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Madrid, Spain), Sapienza Università di Roma (Rome, Italy), Paris Lodron Universität Salzburg (Salzburg, Austria), Stockholm University (Stockholm, Sweden), and the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (Tübingen, Germany).

We are committed to the shared long-term, research-led education agenda set out in this Joint Mission Statement, creating new opportunities for our students and staff over the coming decade. Our European scope will help our constituent communities to transcend their respective national frameworks; at the same time, we will collectively encourage each other to further develop a shared approach rooted in our civic mission. Our Alliance is to serve as a catalyst helping our students and staff to become responsible and knowledgeable citizens as well as creative professionals interested in, and capable of, tackling key societal challenges in a rapidly changing world.

As we approach both the end of the first cycle of European University Alliance funding (under the Erasmus+ programme) and the midterm point of RIS4CIVIS (launched under Horizon2020), we are more convinced than ever of the need to further intensify our deep institutional cooperation. With education as the Alliance’s backbone, deeply linked to research, innovation, and service to society, we will also continue to transform each of our own universities, reinforcing our shared civic engagement, promoting and embedding all forms of mobility, developing collaborative education and research, and jointly addressing real-world challenges.

A SHARED CIVIC IDENTITY FOR TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Our shared self-understanding as European civically minded universities entails espousing a set of shared values. These principles not only shape the Alliance's own activities but also our contributions to the wider debates about the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as set out in the European Strategy for Universities. We consider them to be fundamental to the success of our Alliance, our respective universities, and the EHEA as a whole:

Scientific Integrity and Academic freedom.

Democracy.

European Integration.

Participative Governance.

Civic engagement.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Open Science.

Sustainability.

By sharing our experiences and connecting with local and global partners, we want to challenge our practices. We also want our education, research, and global engagement to be inspired and strengthened by the people, cities and societies we serve. We will continue to offer new experiences to our students, staff and alumni, which will confront them with real-world societal challenges and promote their entrepreneurial spirit. Service-learning experiences through community engagement, certifiable practical skills, and co-creation spaces for social innovation are some of the shared instruments our Alliance will mobilise to assert its civic identity and help enrich its wider communities.

As an Alliance, we address three levels of thought and action: the local, the European, and the global. At the local level, we seek to build bridges between the academic world and the social, economic, political, and cultural worlds of the regions in which we are rooted. We share the view that research-intensive, comprehensive universities such as ours have a social responsibility towards our local communities. Therefore, we want to establish richer, mutually beneficial interactions between the university and partners in the local community. The resulting co-creation of knowledge and skills involving our societal stakeholders will prove a further resource, empowering our students and staff to make informed choices and adapt to current and future societal demands while preserving academic freedom and autonomy of research. As a place to share expertise and best practice, the Alliance helps each of our institutions engage with their local environments, and fosters more informed and engaged forms of citizenship, thus contributing towards strengthening democratic practices.

At the European level, transnational learning experiences offered by our inter-university campus will anchor the Alliance over the long-term. We are committed to further develop these in the spirit of advancing research-based education that sees students understand and reproduce scientific, evidence-led approaches to problem-solving as well as cultivate skills in critical thinking, clear writing, and excellent oral presentation. Students will also acquire a range of transferable skills, certifiable professional competences, as well as greater multicultural and multilingual awareness. Ultimately, our joint educational offer is to foster knowledgeable, responsible citizens.

Our shared commitment to democracy, participation, diversity, and equity is reflected in the topics of our research, education and outreach as well as in our own policies. Mobility, for example, must be seamless and embedded to make it inclusive and accessible, which motivates us to achieve the necessary institutional transformations. Furthermore, our Governance structures are based on a participative principle enabling all stakeholders inherent to our universities (i.e. students, academics, researchers, and professional staff) as well as external partners to contribute significantly to the definition of the orientations and activities of the Alliance. Through targeted shared actions, we will help reduce disparities in student opportunities, address skill gaps in local markets, improve transition of graduates to the professional realm, and maximise chances of success for all our students. Strengthening access to quality education and knowledge co-production in the Alliance includes a widening participation agenda to entice less-represented groups to integrate our constituent communities alongside a challenge-driven community engagement agenda informed by Open Science principles.

A civic university in today's multipolar world must not only act locally but also globally. Accordingly, it is a high priority for us to bridge the distance between the EHEA and other parts of the world by forming active and lasting partnerships. We begin with our closest neighbouring continent, in full awareness of the interconnections and interdependencies between Europe and Africa, which are a key to the future of our common ability to rise to a series of acute societal challenges. The African continent will play a determining role in the demographic, economic, cultural, and environmental transitions of the 21st century. Europe and Africa, joined by the Mediterranean and sharing entangled histories, must find the means to address their shared past, present, and future together through a constructive dialogue, joint production of knowledge and education of youth. As Africa is increasingly recognised as a key partner of the European Union, we aim to position the Alliance as a catalyst for more intense partnerships in higher education between us. In addition to the leverageable expertise across the many bilateral agreements our member universities have throughout the region, the Alliance has signed six initial strategic partnerships across Africa: Université Hassan II (Casablanca, Morocco), Université Cheikh Anta Diop (Dakar, Senegal), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa), Makerere University (Kampala, Uganda), Eduardo Mondlane University (Maputo, Mozambique), and Université de Sfax (Sfax, Tunisia). As these partnerships were formalised during the set-up phase, moving forward, we are ideally positioned to deepen them in favour of structural long-term collaborations centred on up-scaling joint efforts in education and research.

A SUCCESSFUL ALLIANCE OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES

Our efforts so far have seen CIVIS become an integral part of the day-to-day work of each member university. The Alliance now impacts all four of the members' core duties – i.e. education, research, innovation, and service to society. A joint CIVIS passport developed during the Alliance's initial stage reflects this commitment as it promotes students' access to, and documents their involvement in, a wide range of activities related to CIVIS.

As a result, all constituent communities of the universities are directly engaged with the Alliance as: (1) professorial, educational staff and student bodies build common educational modules and curricula; (2) academic staff engaged in our emerging challenge-driven research strategy; and (3) administrative personnel across all 10 institutions provides the Alliance with expert support, quality control, mutual best practice learning opportunities, and a range of shared solutions and tools. These resources allow us to jointly implement long-term structural changes, such as the joint service units for mobility and educational offers as well as a shared IT infrastructure, our Digital Campus. Furthermore, a standing CIVIS central office now functions as the shared central body entrusted with the Alliance's day-to-day management, quality control, collective fundraising efforts, administration of shared funding, and management of Alliance-wide strategic international associated partnerships. Student-centric in outlook, we build on a three-dimensional vision of the student experience, where they are the primary beneficiaries of the training, co-creators of innovation, and main actors of intercultural experiences.

We build our European university in profound awareness and genuine appreciation of the needs and perspectives of its members. Our Alliance brings together nearly half a million students and 75000 staff members, making it one of the largest and thus most influential players within the EHEA. Aware of this responsibility, we have invested great care in building sustainable and efficient governance structures. They proceed from a profound recognition that the specificities of the member universities are a critical asset of CIVIS, and thus allow this diversity to thrive. In this respect, co-creation with students and staff is key to the successful implementation of our activities.

This attitude is the basis of our collaboration: we know and trust each other. We also have a shared understanding of the subsidiarity principle where joint actions and programmes are implemented in respect of each partner's autonomous decision-making processes. As a result, our Alliance sees each member commit to our shared European University Alliance in accordance with their respective capacities. This in turn ensures the CIVIS Alliance has the structural human, material, educational, and financial resources needed for its long-term realisation.

We are committed to sustainably transforming our institutions through our Alliance to improve the quality, international competitiveness, and attractiveness of the EHEA and European Research Area (ERA). These transformations will encourage the exchange of best practices and expertise, remove administrative barriers to communities working together, and develop richer links with our local and international associated partners. In addition, we will continue to develop digital tools and facilitate mobility to build a vibrant inter-university transnational community. Existing CIVIS structures – e.g. the hubs and open labs – shepherd our joint action geared towards gradually achieving the long-term vision for European University Alliances. Over time, we will consolidate and formalise CIVIS' shared administrative structures through such means as a specific consortium agreement or a standing legal entity. The resulting dedicated secretariat, guided by a participatory governance structure, will further underpin our long-term agenda.

A CHALLENGE-DRIVEN UNITY IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Through our interconnected education and research, we commit to addressing key societal challenges the planet is facing today. We have identified five such topics for joint education rooted in cutting-edge research, which we organise in collaborative Hubs:

Climate, Environment, Energy.
Society, Culture and Heritage.
Health.
Cities, Territories and Mobilities.
Digital and Technological Transformations.

In each of these Hubs, our Alliance provides students, academics and wider community members with new opportunities and the necessary tools to rise to these challenges. Through our Open Labs we invite communities onto our respective campuses and encourage members of our community to meet, exchange, collaborate and co-create. Our excellence in research will be a key asset for building common research-based training and other innovative activities in these areas. We will strive to reinforce the education and research links existing between our universities through disciplinary collaborations, interdisciplinary exchanges, shared research infrastructure, and incentives for co-creation of joint initiatives. Considering the current information revolution and the fast-changing pace of our societies and job markets, we must adapt the way we teach, research, and communicate. Our Alliance stimulates a collaborative culture rooted in forward-looking skills and newest ideas for educational methods. To share and build knowledge widely and fairly among students, teachers, researchers, and civil society, we help make educational, scientific and citizen science resources accessible to as wide an audience as possible in line with Open Science and Education principles. We engage with the needs of the digital transition through new online platforms, instruments and practices which are to increase the interconnections within the Alliance in support of virtual and hybrid forms of educational and scientific exchanges. And we support existing projects, and continuously develop new ones, creating transnational and transdisciplinary programs for our students and our staff geared towards meeting new educational and societal challenges.

THE NEXT TWO DECADES FROM FOUNDATION TO STRUCTURAL CONSOLIDATION

We reiterate our full endorsement of the long-term principles and goals of CIVIS. As we move forward, the key achievements we have already secured, and can sustainably rely on, are the structural pillars of our Alliance. These include a shared governance structure, tried-and-tested participatory mechanisms, a standing central office, Hubs devoted to developing an ever innovating and relevant educational portfolio, Open Labs articulating science and civic engagement, a shared digital campus developing a growing number of innovative digital tools and a set of shared service units.

In the medium-term, the upcoming phase of consolidation of our Alliance we will:

substantially boost our civic engagement, notably through a quickening of our Open Lab agenda;

strengthen our inter-university campus, notably through increased mobility in various forms for all status groups;

achieve the implementation of joint education and degree programs, driven by our interdisciplinary thematic hubs.

Over the long term, as members of a standing Alliance, we are committed to achieve structural progress in support of seamless and embedded mobility (physical or virtual), notably by the ongoing development of Alliance-wide mutual recognition of academic courses. We will sustain a continued strategic dialogue aimed at identifying opportunities for further cooperation in education and research centred on common strategic and funding priorities. We will also continue to implement efficient internal quality assurance mechanisms compliant with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA. And finally, we will contribute to the broader EHEA by advocating for matters pertaining to its continued evolution.

Ultimately, the further deepening of the cooperation between the members will produce the necessary complementarities allowing for challenge-driven, intersectoral education and research programs that go beyond the usual collaborative dynamics among HEIs. Our shared commitments, common platforms, and joint education programmes, along with a clear distribution of roles, will collectively allow us to pursue our long-term systemic goal of contributing towards the restructuring of the EHEA while respecting each of our universities' specificities and celebrating the diversity of our national traditions of higher education.