

First 17 “European Universities” selected: a major step towards building a European Education Area

The European Commission has today announced the higher education institutions from all over Europe that will be part of the first “European Universities” alliances. They will enhance the quality and attractiveness of European higher education and boost cooperation between institutions, their students and staff.

Out of 54 applications received, 17 European Universities involving 114 higher education institutions from 24 Member States were selected (see [Annex](#)), based on an evaluation carried out by 26 independent external experts, including rectors, professors and researchers, appointed by the Commission. European Universities are transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that share a long-term strategy and promote European values and identity. The initiative is designed to significantly strengthen mobility of students and staff, and foster the quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness of European higher education.

Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: *“I am pleased to see the ambition of the first 17 European Universities, which will act as role models for others across the EU. They will enable the next generations of students to experience Europe by studying in different countries. I am convinced that this initiative, a key building block of the European Education Area, will be a real game changer for higher education in Europe, boosting excellence and inclusion.”*

The selection of European Universities includes a broad range of higher education institutions from across the EU, from universities of applied sciences, technical universities and universities of fine arts to comprehensive and research-intensive universities.

European Universities will become inter-university campuses around which students, doctoral candidates, staff and researchers can move seamlessly. They will pool their expertise, platforms and resources to deliver joint curricula or modules covering various disciplines. These curricula will be very flexible and will allow students to personalise their education, choosing what, where and when to study and get a European degree. European Universities will also contribute to the sustainable economic development of the regions where they are located, as their students will work closely with companies, municipal authorities, academics and researchers to find solutions to the challenges their regions are facing.

In total, a budget of up to €85 million is available for the first 17 “European Universities”. Each alliance will receive up to €5 million in the coming three years to start implementing their plans and pave the way for

other higher education institutions across the EU to follow. Their progress will be closely monitored.

This first call – together with a second one to be launched this autumn – will test different models to implement the new concept of European Universities and its potential to boost higher education. For the next long-term EU budget running from 2021-2027, the Commission proposed to fully roll out European Universities under Erasmus+, with a significantly increased budget. While some alliances are comprehensive and cover all disciplines, others are for example focusing on urban coastal sustainability, social sciences or global health. Each alliance is composed on an average of seven higher education institutions from all parts of Europe, leading to new partnerships. This reflects the distribution of applications received from the various countries.

Background

The European Commission proposed this new initiative to European Union leaders ahead of the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017. The initiative was endorsed by the European Council in December 2017 which called for the emergence of at least 20 European Universities by 2024 and is part of the push towards establishing a European Education Area by 2025.

Developed together with Member States, higher education institutions and student organisations, the concept of the European Universities attracted applications from 54 alliances involving more than 300 higher education institutions from 28 Member States and other Erasmus+ Programme Countries. They replied to an Erasmus+ call on “European Universities” launched in October 2018.

The €60 million originally set aside for this new Erasmus+ initiative has been increased to €85 million allowing for the funding of 17 alliances rather than the 12 initially foreseen.

For more information

[Factsheet](#)

[European Universities Initiative](#)

[Information on the Call for Proposals](#)

[€24 million cryptocurrency theft unraveled with Eurojust's support](#)

The Hague, 25 June 2019

✘ The UK and Dutch national authorities, in a joint operation with Eurojust and Europol, arrested 6 people as part of an ongoing investigation into a €24 million cryptocurrency theft. The suspects were arrested following simultaneous search warrants that were carried out in Charlcombe, Bath, Trowbridge, UK, as well as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The thieves are suspected of targetting users' bitcoin tokens, affecting at least 4 000 victims in 12 countries; these numbers are expected to grow further. With the active support of Eurojust and Europol, the authorities seized a larger number of electronic devices, equipment and valuable assets.

The investigation relates to 'typosquatting', where a well-known online cryptocurrency exchange is 'spoofed', or recreated to imitate the genuine site, to gain access to victims' Bitcoin wallets, stealing their login details and funds.

The arrested criminals are suspected of having committed computer misuse act offences and money laundering.

In February 2018, the South West Regional Cyber Crime Unit (SW RCCU) identified possible suspects living in the Netherlands and referred the case to the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT), hosted at Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3). Europol organised two operational meetings, allowing for the smooth exchange of intelligence and evidence, which led to the successful outcome of the operation. A coordination meeting was held at Eurojust, the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit, to decide on a joint strategy and prepare for the smooth coordination of the action day.

The UK SW RCCU led today's operation, supported by the Dutch police (Politie) and UK National Crime Agency (NCA).

Photo © Shutterstock

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[Adoption of new rules to better protect children caught in cross-border parental disputes](#)

What is the Brussels IIa Regulation?

The Brussels IIa Regulation is the cornerstone of EU judicial cooperation in cross-border matrimonial matters (divorce, separation, marriage annulment) and matters of parental responsibility, including custody and access rights, and international child abduction. The Regulation has applied in all Member States, except Denmark, since 1 March 2005.

With the rising number of international families, now estimated at 16 million, cross-border disputes on family matters have increased in the EU. There are about 140,000 international divorces per year in the EU. There are around 1,800 cases of parental child abduction within the EU every year.

The Council adopted today improvements to the EU rules ("Brussels IIa Regulation") that protect children in the context of cross-border disputes relating to parental responsibility and child abduction. The new rules ("Brussels IIa Recast Regulation") make court proceedings clearer, faster and more efficient. They are based on the [proposal made by the European Commission in 2016](#).

Which cases does the Regulation apply to?

The Regulation applies only in cross-border cases within the EU:

- It sets out rules determining which country's courts are responsible for dealing with matrimonial matters, parental responsibility and child abduction in disputes involving more than one country.
- It ensures that judgments issued in one EU country are recognised and enforced in another EU country.

The Regulation focusses on settling procedural aspects of cross-border cases only.

Member States retain the sole responsibility of any substantive rules, for example, on how to exercise access rights or on which criteria apply when attributing custody rights to a parent.

What are the main changes adopted today?

Since its entry into application in 2005, the Brussels IIa Regulation has worked well, apart from some issues in the area of parental responsibility. The new Brussels IIa Recast Regulation will improve matters in this area. The new rules will enter into force 20 days after publication in the Official Journal.

The new rules aim to further enhance cross-border judicial proceedings on the basis of mutual trust between EU countries. By removing the remaining obstacles to the free movement of decisions, simplifying the procedures and enhancing their efficiency, the best interests of the child will be better protected. The new rules will bring legal certainty, reduce costs and, most importantly, limit the length of proceedings in international child abduction cases, for the benefit of both children and their parents.

The changes concern mainly proceedings related to parental responsibility matters and international child abduction and will have a positive impact on all procedures involving children by:

- *Settling cross-border child abduction cases faster*

The deadlines applying to different stages of the child return procedure will be limited to a maximum period of 6 weeks for the first instance court and 6 weeks for each court of appeal. Also Central Authorities will process applications for return faster.

- *Ensuring the child is heard*

Children who are capable of forming their own views, will be given the opportunity to express these views in all proceedings concerning them. This will apply to matters of parental responsibility and international child abduction cases. Determining how and by whom the child is heard is a matter left to national law.

- *Ensuring effective enforcement of decisions in other Member States*

With the new rules, the *exequatur*, an intermediate procedure required to obtain cross-border enforcement, will be abolished for all decisions.

Under the new rules, enforcement can be rejected or suspended largely under the same conditions in all Member States, increasing legal certainty for all citizens and in particular the children concerned.

- *Improving cooperation between Member States' authorities*

Good cooperation between the Central Authorities of different Member States in handling child cases is an indispensable prerequisite for mutual trust. The new rules promote better cooperation between Central Authorities, which are the direct point of contact for parents. Also, child welfare authorities will be better integrated into this cross-border cooperation.

The new rules also clarify the sensitive issue of the placement of a child in another Member State, and set up a clear procedure to obtain consent from the Member State where the child is to be placed.

- *Setting out clearer rules on the circulation of authentic instruments and agreements*

Considering the growing number of Member States which allow out-of-court agreements on legal separation and divorce or on matters of parental responsibility, the new rules will facilitate the circulation of the instruments and agreements.

What are the main benefits of the new rules for children and their parents?

The new rules ensure legal clarity, reduce costs related to proceedings and legal assistance and, most importantly, shorten the length of proceedings, to limit the negative impact on the children as much as possible.

- *More efficient return proceedings*

Currently, average return proceedings for cross-border parental child abduction take up to **24 weeks**, and it can also be much longer in some cases, especially where Member States have several levels of appeal.

With the new rules, return proceedings before a court will be capped to a maximum period: 6 weeks for the first instance court and 6 weeks for each court of appeal. In addition, the Central Authority will have to efficiently process the application, with the new rules introducing a 5-day deadline to confirm receipt of the application.

In order to speed up enforcement, the court that issued the return decision will be able to declare it provisionally enforceable. If the return decision cannot be enforced within 6 weeks, the parent will be informed about the reasons for the delay. In cases where children need to be placed in a foster family or an educational institution in another Member State, the receiving Member State will have to approve or refuse the placement within 3 months.

- *Reduced costs*

Citizens will avoid the heavy costs usually linked to court proceedings. For example, in case of return proceedings, parents will be invited to engage in mediation. This saves possible litigation costs which represent on average **€ 2,200** for the entire proceedings. The new recast Regulation now also abolishes *exequatur* proceedings, which involve costs of **around € 1,100 to 4,000** per case in some Member States. In addition, speedier enforcement will allow families to save money for the work of a specialised lawyer estimated, depending on the Member State, at between **€ 1,000 and 4,000** per every additional 10 working hours.

- *Clearer rules*

The new rules will, for example, clarify the procedure for placing a child in a foster family or an educational institution abroad and ensure that such requests are handled quickly. Currently, it is unclear in which cases the receiving State needs to give its consent, and which documents have to be submitted.

Another clarification will make it possible for courts and authorities to request social reports not only on children, but also on adults or siblings if these are of relevance in child-related proceedings. Also child welfare authorities will be able to obtain the necessary information from other Member States through the Central Authorities. The new rules set out minimum requirements for a request for a social report and a 3-month time limit for the requested authority to provide the report.

What happens if a parent abducts his or her child ?

If an international couple splits up, the temptation for one of the spouses to return to his or her home country with the child(ren) can be high. If both parents have joint custody for the child, one or other parent taking the child with them without permission violates the rights of custody of the left-behind parent and puts the best interests of the child at risk. The new Brussels IIa Recast Regulation, like the current rules, prevents moving children across borders by establishing a mechanism for the prompt return of the child to the Member State where the child used to live before the abduction. This mechanism is largely based on the return mechanism of the 1980 [Hague Convention](#), which the Regulation supplements.

These return proceedings take place in the Member State to which the child was abducted. If the return is ordered and the child returns, the aim is achieved and the custody case, if the parents wish so, can be heard by the courts of the Member State of the child's habitual residence.

If the Member State the child was abducted to refuses the return, an additional procedure comes into play to give a final say on the return of the child to the court of the Member State in which the child lived before the abduction.

For more information

[Factsheet](#)

European Commission appoints new Head of Representation in Croatia and an Adviser for the preparation of the country's Council Presidency*

The European Commission today appointed Mr Ognian Zlatev as the new Head of the Commission's Representation in Zagreb, Croatia. He will take up his duties on 1 July 2019. Mr Zlatev is succeeding Mr Branko Baričević, who is becoming an Adviser to President Juncker for the preparation of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2020.

1. New Head of the Commission's Representation in Zagreb

Mr Zlatev, a Bulgarian national, is currently Head of the European Commission's Representation in Sofia, Bulgaria. A highly experienced expert in communication, with nearly 30 years of professional experience, he successfully supported the Commission's work over the past 6 years at the Representation in Sofia and notably during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2018. Mr Zlatev brings excellent knowledge of EU affairs, outstanding management skills and considerable expertise in media development, South-East Europe and the Western Balkans. He speaks Bulgarian, English, Russian, Croatian and Serbian.

Mr Zlatev graduated from Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski and holds an M.A. in Classical Philology. Subsequently, he obtained qualifications in political communication, media relations and development, election campaigning and NGO management.

Mr Zlatev has strong communication skills. He joined the European Commission in 2011 and was the head of the communication unit at the Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Prior to this, Mr Zlatev served as a Member of the Managing Board of the Bulgarian National Television, and founded and managed the Media Development Centre in Bulgaria. He was also a founding member and President of the South-East European Network for Professionalisation of the Media, to which 15 media centres and institutes from the region belong. He was a Director of the Information Centre for the Open Society Institute in Sofia, Manager of the BBC Centre in Bulgaria and Exchange Officer at the British Council office in Bulgaria.

Mr Zlatev has also worked as a consultant for international institutions (UNESCO, OSCE, World Bank) in South-East Europe and the Western Balkans, amongst others. He is a member of the European Association of Communications Directors and the President of the South-East European Public Sector Communication Association since 2014.

2. Adviser for Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the EU

The European Commission today appointed **Mr Baričević** as an Adviser to the President on matters relating to the preparation of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Mr Baričević has been the Head of the European Commission Representation in the Republic of Croatia since 1 July 2013, when Croatia became the EU's 28th Member State. He joined the European Commission from the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he had served, between 2005 and 2012, as the Head of Mission of Croatia to the European Union in Brussels. He had previously worked in different diplomatic missions of Croatia (to the U.S., Cyprus and Portugal). Prior to his diplomatic career, Mr Baričević was a medical doctor, having undertaken studies in Zagreb, New York and Munich.

The European Commission will thus continue to draw on his vast diplomatic experience and support during this important time.

Background

The European Commission has Representations in all EU Member States, as well as Regional Offices in Barcelona, Belfast, Bonn, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Marseille, Milan, Munich and Wrocław. The Representations are the Commission's eyes, ears and voice on the ground in all EU Member States. They interact with national authorities and stakeholders and inform the media and the public about EU policies. The Representations report to the Commission's headquarters on significant developments in the Member States. Since the beginning of the Juncker Commission, Heads of Representations are appointed by the President and are his political representatives in the Member State to which they are posted.

More information is available [here](#).

* [updated at:17h05 on: 25/06/2019]