Press Release

Making the University of the Future a reality

Una Europa officially kicks off 1EUROPE

On 22nd and 23rd January 2020, the UNA Europa University Alliance Europe kicked off its flagship project 1EUROPE. Funded under the first Erasmus+ Call for European Universities, 1EUROPE aims to launch a living laboratory to develop future university models that are both replicable and scalable.

Hosted at the premises of the Flemish government, the public kick-off on 22nd January was opened by Luc Sels, Rector of KU Leuven, the coordinating university. Luc Sels set the scene by framing the dimensions of the new collective endeavor: "UNA Europa is becoming a true powerhouse in Europe, an Alliance of 8 comprehensive very strong leading research-intensive universities with global reputation… Collectively, the networks stands for over half a million in student and staff population, and if you take into account the online learners, we number in the millions." The kick-off event reflects UNA Europa's commitment to inclusiveness from the outset, as Luc Sels pointed out: "This is not only about us… We want strong external stakeholder involvement from the very beginning."

In her keynote speech, Themis Christophidou, Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture at the European Commission, highlighted the potential of universities to act as "springboard helping Europe to become future proof. It is by coming together in teams across disciplines, countries and languages that talented students, researchers and academics will be able to devise solutions to our pressing societal needs."

To promote an interactive debate between the panel and the audience, the core of the event was arranged as a fishbowl debate. This innovative method proved highly successful in triggering a vibrant discussion on a series of crucial points, such as:

- The transformation of European Universities and the European Research Area
- The nature of the university of the future
- The importance of co-creation with stakeholders in building the European Higher Education Area

Some highlights and soundbites:

"We have to transform in order to keep ourselves existing. We are one of the oldest institutions, and I think the essence of the university has always been to be in deep connection with transformative evolutions." (Reine Meylaerts, Vice Rector for Research, KU Leuven)

"I think this new digital mobility needs to be blended in with what traditional universities also are; institutions that form a personality, that are a journey of personal development, that are in your face and challenge you and push your boundaries." (Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Vice President for International Matters, Freie Universität Berlin)

"For some students it might be a necessity that they have to study online, they can't afford to relocate to a university city...and I think it's important to consider that when growing the university of the future."

(Andrew Wilson, UNA Europa and University of Edinburgh Student Board)

"I think that European universities cannot build without engaging with stakeholders. We designed European universities with stakeholders, they're already our associated partners and we count a lot of work in with them for future steps." (Maria Gravari-Barbas, Vice President for International Relations Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne and Chair of UNA Europa Self Steering Committee on Cultural Heritage)

From ambition to action

Thursday, 23rd January, marked the second day of the official opening, serving as first major internal forum for discussion to kick-start the numerous building blocks of the 1EUROPE project. The day featured two plenary sessions and eight parallel workshops. Academics and staff involved in the project clusters on "Teaching and Learning" and "Mobility" as well as the Self Steering Committees met to decide on how to move from ambition to action.

Being asked about the central elements on his 1EUROPE agenda, Bartosz Brozek, Work Package leader of our "Future UniLab" from Jagiellonien University explained that "The problem-focused approach is really about a change of mindset. So, when a researcher, or a student, or an educator, realizes that their goal is to solve problems, not to work in a field, not to transfer existing knowledge to business, not to teach about particular issues, but to solve problems then the entire perspective changes." 1EUROPE's "Future UniLab" will be a living laboratory to develop and test the new methodologies necessary to operate future universities.

Made up of academics in four interdisciplinary focus areas from UNA Europa's partner universities, the steering committees are in the driver's seat to develop the more than 20 international curricula and mobility formats foreseen in the pilot. The focus areas are: European Studies, Cultural Heritage, Sustainability and Data Science and AI.

The internal kick-off also included the first meeting of UNA Europa's Student Board, a pivotal element for the success of the pilot. Andrew Wilson, President of the Students' Association of University of Edinburgh was elected as its President. In plenary, he thanked his fellow students for their trust and underlined his enthusiastic commitment to 1EUROPE, stating: "The majority of students and young people (in the UK) are progressive internationalists and no Withdrawal Agreement will change that. I'm proud that this boy from Blackpool has been elected as President of the UNA Europa Student Board."

Professor Peter Lievens, coordinator of 1EUROPE from KU Leuven, concluded the fruitful day with the appeal "Whatever we do, let's not forget: We do it for the students and future generations."

About UNA Europa and 1EUROPE

UNA Europa brings together a community of eight leading research-intensive universities, 415,000 students and 68,000 staff, including 37,000 academic staff. Our mission is to create a truly European inter-university environment, where outstanding research is continuously linked to transnational learning and innovative, critical thinking. Central to the success of the European Higher Education Area, UNA Europa seeks collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders from the very beginning of its activities.

UNA Europa brings together eight leading research universities with global reputation and reach.

Our alliance partners are:

- Freie Universität Berlin
- Alma mater studiorum Università di Bologna
- University of Edinburgh

- Helsingin Yliopisto
- Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie
- KU Leuven
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

1EUROPE is our three-year pilot funded under the Erasmus+ Call for European Universities. UNA Europa is building a living laboratory to develop future university models that are both replicable and scalable, providing a constant drive to create high-quality outputs that can easily be adopted and implemented in different contexts.

Beyond the 1EUROPE pilot, UNA Europa will ensure the success and sustainability of the alliance and actively contribute to the development of the European Higher Education and Research Areas. In February 2019, the UNA Europa association (vzw) was formally established in Brussels to deliver this long-term goal.

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