

## Europe's Competitiveness Requires Strong Universities

*Urgent call to retain references to Higher Education and European Universities Alliances in the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) regulation*

### Statement by Unite! Executive Board

11 May 2026

The **Unite! University Alliance** urges Members of the European Parliament to reconsider the proposed amendments to the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) regulation currently under discussion in the European Parliament's ITRE Committee.

The amendments currently under discussion in the ITRE Committee – notably the shortening of Recital 21 and the deletion of Article 30 – would effectively remove all explicit references to **higher education institutions** and **European Universities alliances**. This would exclude **European Universities alliances** from future eligibility for strategic investments, despite being central actors in strengthening the **European Education Area, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area**.

Eliminating references to higher education from the ECF regulation would:

- **Reduce Europe's capacity to respond to critical skills shortages**, highlighted in the Letta report and Draghi report– with the European Universities alliances providing a unique position to deliver highly advanced training and education at large scales.
- Weaken the connection between **industrial investment and Europe's talent and innovation ecosystems**, (also critically stated in the Draghi report,) – as European Universities alliances constitute innovation hubs linking Higher Education Institutions to their surrounding regional ecosystems: municipalities, SMEs, large companies, start-ups, NGOs, schools, citizens, and civic actors.
- **Increase pressure on the Erasmus+ budget**, at a moment when the programme already faces declining higher education allocations.

Consequently, these factors would **seriously weaken Europe's capacity to develop the skills, talent and innovation ecosystems required to remain globally competitive**.

We therefore strongly urge Members of the European Parliament to:

- **Retain Recital 21 and its reference to university Alliances**, thereby ensuring that skills development, higher education and academia-business cooperation remain recognised as essential components of Europe's competitiveness.
- **Preserve Article 30 and its reference to higher education**, maintaining the legal basis for structured cooperation between higher education, research institutions and industry.
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European Universities alliances represent one of the EU's most successful instruments for deep institutional transformation, cross-border collaboration, talent development, and accelerated commercialisation of research outputs. Excluding them from the ECF regulation would be a strategic setback at a moment when Europe must strengthen—not dilute—its investment in knowledge skills and innovation.

We urge policymakers to safeguard Europe's long-term competitiveness by ensuring that higher education and European Universities alliances remain explicitly included in the ECF regulation.