

# Multilingual policies, practices and aspirations within European University Alliances

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Les alliances universitaires européennes (EUAs) ont été créées pour améliorer la compétitivité internationale des universités en Europe et promouvoir les valeurs et l'identité européennes. Bien qu'aucune étude systématique n'ait été entreprise sur le multilinguisme dans les EUAs, tout porte à penser que l'anglais domine dans les activités et les pratiques linguistiques de ces EUAs. Afin d'examiner leurs politiques, pratiques et aspirations en matière de multilinguisme, une enquête a été menée auprès des 24 EUAs du deuxième appel. Bien qu'une large majorité des EUAs ne dispose pas encore d'une politique linguistique formelle, le multilinguisme est souvent mis en avant comme l'une des priorités dans la majorité des alliances et certaines d'entre elles ont prévu plusieurs actions en lien avec le multilinguisme et le plurilinguisme. Cependant, l'anglais domine la communication orale et écrite, interne et externe, dans la plupart des EUAs. Ces données indiquent que sans politiques linguistiques formelles et sans aménagement concret soutenant le multilinguisme, la diversité linguistique et culturelle inhérente aux EUAs pourrait être menacée.

Die Europäischen Hochschulallianzen (EUAs) wurden gegründet, um die internationale Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der Hochschulen in Europa zu verbessern und europäische Werte und Identität zu fördern. Obwohl bisher keine systematische Untersuchung zur Mehrsprachigkeit in EUAs durchgeführt wurde, scheint Englisch in mehreren EUAs und ihren Praktiken zu dominieren. Um ihre mehrsprachigen Strategien, Praktiken und Bestrebungen zu untersuchen, wurde in der vorliegenden Studie eine Umfrage unter den 24 EUAs der zweiten Ausschreibung durchgeführt. Obwohl keine der EUAs über eine formelle Sprachenpolitik verfügt, wird Mehrsprachigkeit in den meisten Allianzen als eine Priorität genannt, und einige von ihnen haben mehrere Maßnahmen zur Mehrsprachigkeit und Plurilingualismus vorgesehen. Allerdings dominiert Englisch in den meisten EUAs die mündliche als auch die schriftliche interne und externe Kommunikation. Diese Daten deuten darauf hin, dass ohne formelle Sprachenpolitik und Umsetzungspläne zur Förderung der Mehrsprachigkeit, die den EUAs innewohnende sprachliche und kulturelle Vielfalt gefährdet sein könnte.

### Mots-clés:

multilinguisme, plurilinguisme, alliances universitaires européennes, enseignement supérieur, politiques linguistiques, pratiques linguistiques, apprentissage des langues.



**Stichwörter:**

Mehrsprachigkeit, Plurilingualismus, Europäische Hochschulallianzen, Hochschulbildung, Sprachenpolitik, Sprachpraktiken, Sprachenlernen.

**Keywords:**

multilingualism, plurilingualism, European University Alliances, higher education, language policies, linguistic practices, language learning

## 1. Introduction

European University Alliances (EUAs) are a flagship initiative of the European strategy for universities that aims at developing transnational, long-term structural, strategic and sustainable cooperations between higher education institutions in Europe in order to improve the international competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe and promote European values and identity.

EUAs aim to offer curricula that will be delivered jointly across inter-university campuses. Students and staff are expected to enjoy physical, virtual or blended mobility to study, train, teach, do research, work or share services at and with cooperating partner institutions. Since EUAs are, by definition, transnational, multilingualism, linguistic and cultural diversity were expected to be at the heart of EUAs, and language policies were the obvious step to enable close collaboration between universities, whilst preserving the linguistic diversity of EUAs. This is why one of the funding criteria for EUAs within the Erasmus+ programme was related to activities regarding multilingualism. However, since the first EUAs started to operate, anecdotal evidence showed a tendency for English to dominate EUAs within teaching and learning, governance, and communication. Courses in many EUAs were offered in English, administrative activities, governing boards, and other collaborative meetings were taking place in English, and internal as well as external communication of EUAs, including their websites, was only or very predominantly in English (see for instance the websites of the Aurora, EC2U, ERUA or EUniWell alliances).

To date, no systematic research has been conducted to address the extent of anglicisation of EUAs. To address this gap, the present study developed a survey for the 24 EUAs of the second call with the aim of finding out about their language policies and practices, as well as the aspirations for multilingualism within these alliances.

## 2. Context and literature review

In the 1990s, much research was devoted to the spread of English in secondary education, as well as on the new forms of English, diversely qualified with adjectives, such as, "global", "international" or "world" or defined as a *lingua franca* – for a very complete research bibliography see Modiano (2024).

Theorising the notion of internationalisation in the context of higher education institutions is not new. It has been claimed that internationalisation is even consubstantial with the birth of European universities in the Middle Ages (Scot 2006), as those institutions became both the targets and the centre of power and business (*ibid.*). The simultaneous rise of globalisation and that of the informational society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Castells 2000) generated a qualitative shift in as much as knowledge and mobilities became essential to the survival of institutions themselves (Deneire & Benmokhtar 2024). The internationalisation of higher education institutions took an essential turn with the implementation of the 1999 Bologna Declaration, which gave a legal framework for the facilitation of internationalisation or, as it were, Europeanisation, of educational contents, curricula, assessments and mobilities. But all this was conceived with no explicit language diversity policy other than the weak commitment of member states to teach (some of the) other EU languages.

A shift in research occurred in the 2000s, with a number of publications focusing on higher education, more specifically in Europe (Truchot 2008; Doiz et al. 2013; Dimova et al. 2015; Bolton et al. 2024). Language policies were more systematically assessed, in particular the implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI) that European universities had gradually experienced since the turn of the century. A typical issue in university language policies seems to be the contradictions, or at best the non-coincidence between collective measures to ensure the sustainability of local languages or multilingualism and the actual practices in higher education. For example, Teigland & Gazzola (2024), in their assessment of Norway's higher education language policy, show how national measures promoting Norwegian in higher education are inadequately explicit, which affects the efficiency of their implementation and results in a continued reinforcement of English as a medium of university instruction.

If we turn to the specific case of the recently created EUAs, most EUAs carry out initiatives related to multilingualism but most focus mainly on language learning opportunities (e.g., Prickett 2024; Schilling et al. 2024). Initiatives on intercomprehension have started in some EUAs (e.g., Corino et al. 2024; Corino et al. 2025), which are examples of good practice in adopting multilingual approaches that go beyond language learning and provide solutions that can be used in all activities EUAs engage in (teaching, research, governance, communication).

Recently, a critical eye has been cast by a few researchers (Castellotti et al. 2023) on the language policy – or rather the lack thereof – of these projects and the contradiction this generates in terms of coherence with European multilingual objectives. Castellotti and her colleagues (2023: 50) point to a common incoherence experienced by researchers and educators in most EUAs: all activities, even those aimed at fostering and enacting multilingualism, are conducted in English. Along the same line, Forlot (forthc.) analyses most EUAs

as multilingual but *de facto* monolingual projects, all centred on a common shared language, English. In a recent ethnographic fieldwork, Forlot (forthc.) describes the embarrassed reactions of the leaders of one of the EUAs' central office who, although stressing the importance of multilingualism, acknowledge that English is everyone's common language and that there is no way out.

The creation of EUAs has increased international mobility for staff within each alliance. At the same time, they have increased the risk of local working languages in each alliance becoming English rather than the local language. Grin (2014) once explained that if research is increasingly published in English, the research processes leading to publications is often conducted in local languages. For instance, Brazilian or Finnish researchers working in a laboratory will interact in Portuguese or Finnish, although most of their publications will be in English. Yet, as international projects, EUAs produce another type of dynamic when it comes to inter-alliance communication for research, teaching, and other inter-alliance activities. Since they encourage people from different countries to work together, the common language between the actors of different alliances is hardly ever another one than English.

All this confirms a tendency towards anglicisation in EUAs, masked under what is called internationalisation. Wächter and Maiworm's report (2014) indicated that the first three countries with the most programmes taught in English were the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden and that 60% of Nordic countries offered EMI Bachelor's and Master's degrees, while countries in Southwestern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Spain and France) had much lower figures. However, according to reports published by the British Council and Studyportals.eu compiled by journalist Emily Dixon (2024), Europe's HE medium of instruction landscape seems to have evolved since 2019, with Spain, Sweden, Denmark and Finland ending numerous English-taught programmes, while France, Italy and Portugal having conversely increased their offer in EMI diplomas. In 2024, the European non-English speaking countries with the largest offer in EMI higher education degrees were Germany and the Netherlands (with more than 2000 English-taught programmes each, despite the current Dutch policy aimed at reducing the number of incoming international students), followed by France – 1400 programmes – and Italy – 1251 programmes (Dixon 2024).

This leads us to the thorny issue of what the unchallenged adoption of English triggers in terms of European identification and in the working environment of the alliances, in those very multilingual spaces, where virtually all actors are non-native English speakers (Forlot forthc.). At this stage, our hypothesis – which goes beyond the scope of this article and would deserve more in-depth research – is that implementation of EUAs has had significant social and professional implications, in particular with regard to the role of English in staff recruitment, human resources, or mere involvement of students and staff in the European nature of the project.

This issue goes beyond the mere question of the variety of English that is used, which in most cases is "non-native" (on the variety of English spoken in Europe, see Jenkins et al. 2001). What is at stake here is not only the supposed quality of English, but the very access to linguistic resources, as language – in this case English language skills – acts as an instrument of informal power, at least as effective as hierarchical status or expertise. Deneire & Forlot (2025) stress that the notion of efficiency – one of the key concepts in neoliberal managerial governmentality, as analysed by Foucault (2004) – leaves little room for communication failures, and thus favours the recruitment or promotion of staff with above-average English proficiency.

Furthermore, if we look at the pedagogical and research activities of the alliances themselves, members' participation in the areas of research or teaching is likely to become restricted to teachers, researchers and students whose skills allow them to engage in advanced English interactions, while a concrete and grassroots multilingual policy would empower the members of each alliance (Corino et al. 2025: 142) irrespective of their English language skills and ensure the participation of more actors in their activities.

This is also, yet only partially, in line with the way the notion of unequal Englishes has been conceptualised and investigated (Tupas & Rubdy 2016), for instance, in the way English continues to be used in postcolonial educational systems. With the significant funding they generate, EUAs have produced numerous opportunities for students and staff to take part in common activities, to be recruited on the project or to join the academic or administrative staff of these Alliances. But all these people are hired on the premise that they have a high command of English, notwithstanding the other languages they might master. All this has then created the conditions of professional inequity, as skills-competent personnel with inadequate English are often excluded from this job or academic market.

As mentioned above, to date, little in-depth research has yet been carried out specifically on EUAs, and very few scholarly publications have examined multilingualism in these alliances. To address this research gap, the present study conducted an explorative study to investigate, in a mainly quantitative way, the multilingual policies, practices, and aspirations of the 24 EUAs of the second call using an online survey.

### **3. Methodology**

An online survey was developed to investigate language policies, language use in teaching and learning, as well as for communication, language learning opportunities, activities on multilingualism, and the use of language techno-

logies within each one of the 24 EUAs of the second call.<sup>1</sup> The survey consisted of six parts, in which EUAs provided information about six themes that cover the main domains of the EPICUR European Model Language Policy (Teaching & Learning, Research, Governance, Communication) – see survey questions in the Appendix.<sup>2</sup>

*Part A: Language policy within the alliance:* Whether or not the alliance and the universities that are part of the alliance have a language policy, whether the alliance plans to develop one, which stakeholders are involved in setting up a language policy, and what resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) does the alliance allocate for the development and the implementation of a language policy.

*Part B: Language use in courses within the alliance:* Whether universities within the alliance have already started to offer courses to students from other universities within the alliance and in which language(s).

*Part C: Language learning within the alliance:* Whether universities or the alliance offer language learning opportunities for students and staff to learn the languages of the alliance; whether they plan to offer such courses in the future; and what resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) the universities or the alliance allocate to the implementation of the language courses.

*Part D: Language use for communication within the alliance:* Which language(s) are being used for communication in meetings across universities within the alliance; which language(s) are being used for written communication across universities within the alliance; and what is the proportion of use of each language.

*Part E: Multilingualism within the alliance:* Whether multilingualism is a priority area within the alliance; whether the alliance is planning any activities on multilingualism; whether the alliance knows how many students and staff within the alliance are multilingual and if so to provide numbers; and what the alliance thoughts are regarding the most important action on multilingualism within a EUA and why.

*Part F: Language technology:* Whether the alliance uses any language technologies (e.g., automatic translation using AI, like DeepL Translate or Google Translate) to facilitate communication in multiple languages at meetings, in the administration, in written communication and/or in lectures.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of the 24 alliances funded in the second call can be found at the EU website: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/866002/Annex%20Selected%20European%20Universities%20-%202nd%20Call.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The EPICUR Model Language Policy can be found at the EPICUR website: <https://archive.epicur.education/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EPICUR-European-model-language-policy7.pdf>

Some of the questions included multiple-choice options and others included open boxes, in which participants could write text.

The online survey was generated by the Quality Management office of the University of Konstanz using the online EvaSys Evaluation platform of the university. A link to the online survey was sent to the management offices of all 24 EUAs of the second round. 17 out of the 24 EUAs of the second round completed the survey. Due to the small number of responses and the explorative nature of the survey, the answers were analysed descriptively.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Language policies within the alliances

None of the 17 alliances had a formal language policy in 2021/22, but five of the alliances had a mission statement or an informal policy regarding the promotion of multilingualism (Aurora, EC2U, EUNICE, EUT+, UNITA), and another five were planning to develop a language policy (EC2U, ENHANCE, ERUA, EUniWell, T4E). For the development of language policies, all alliances involved academic departments, four out of the five involved higher administration and students, and three of the five involved also their language centre and non-academic staff. In terms of resources for the development and implementation of language policies, all alliances have indicated personnel, and three alliances have indicated that multilingualism is part of a work package, and as a result, they have access to funding and technological resources. However, it is unclear if the personnel involved were released from other duties in order to contribute to the development and implementation of the language policy.

### 4.2 Language use in courses within the alliance

The vast majority (14 out of 17) of the alliances had started to offer courses to students from other universities within the alliance. All 14 alliances offered courses in English; five of them offered courses only in English (EuroTeQ, ENGAGE.EU, ENLIGHT, FILMEU, Ulysseus), whereas the other nine alliances offered courses in English and in the local language of their University (Aurora, CircleU, EC2U, ERUA, EUNICE, EURECA-PRO, EUT+, T4E, UNITA). Finally, three alliances offered courses also in the language of other alliance members (ERUA, EUT+, T4E).

### 4.3 Language learning within the alliance

Most alliances (N=13/17) reported that they offer language learning opportunities for students to learn the languages of the alliance, as shown in Figure 1, apart from one alliance reporting that they do not offer such courses at the time but plan to develop them in the future. Interestingly, there was a lot of variation in the languages offered. Five alliances reported that they offer language courses for all languages of the alliance (EC2U, ENHANCE, EuroTeQ, EUT+, UNITA), one alliance (UNITA) reported that they offer inter-

comprehension courses, others that they do not offer courses for lesser-used languages, like Danish and Greek (e.g., ERUA), but they organise language tandems and language cafes for all languages. Some alliances reported that they offer language courses beyond the languages of the alliance, e.g., Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, Vietnamese (Aurora, CircleU). Finally, several alliances mentioned English courses, although English is not an official language of any of the universities in the alliance.

A smaller number of alliances (N=10/17) reported that they offer language learning opportunities for staff, as shown in Figure 2, and three alliances that do not offer such courses plan to develop them in the future. The language offer for staff is more limited than for students, with only three alliances mentioning that they offer courses for all languages of the alliance (EC2U, T4E, UNITA) and most mentioning English courses.

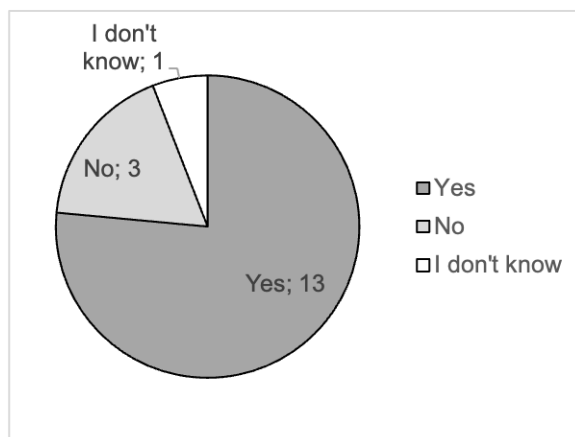


Fig.1: Do universities or the alliance offer language learning opportunities for students to learn the languages of the alliance?

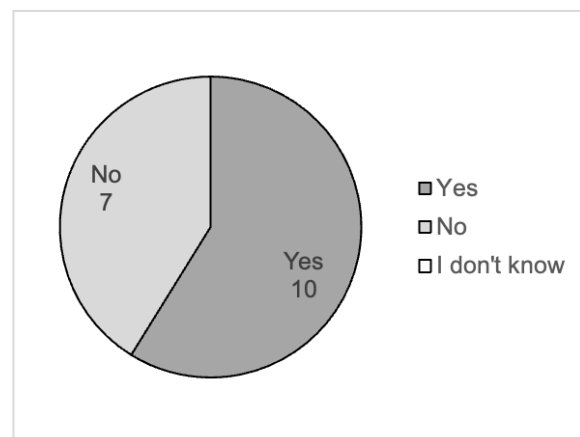


Fig.2: Do universities or the alliance offer language learning opportunities for staff to learn the languages of the alliance?

Regarding the resources used by alliances to implement these courses, the alliances use resources from the local Universities and language centres rather than additional resources from the alliance; CircleU and EC2U mentioned that they use Erasmus+ funding and Ulysseus uses a Moodle platform of the alliance.

#### 4.4 Language use for communication within the alliance

English plays a dominant role for communication in both meetings within the alliance and in written communication. In alliance meetings, 12 of the alliances reported using exclusively English (ATHENA, EC2U, ENGAGE.EU, ENHANCE, ENLIGHT, EUNICE, EUniWell, EURECA-PRO, EuroTeQ, FILMEU, T4E, Ulysseus), 4 reported that they use English between 85% to 98% (Aurora, CircleU, ERUA, UNITA) of the time, and one alliance reported that they use English 70% of the time (EUT+), as shown in Figure 3. For written

communication, 11 alliances use exclusively English (ATHENA, EC2U, ENGAGE.EU, ENHANCE, ENLIGHT, EUNICE, EUniWell, EURECA-PRO, EuroTeQ, FILMEU, T4E) and 5 use English between 80% and 98% of the time (Aurora, CircleU, ERUA, EUT+, UNITA), as shown in Figure 4. Only one alliance (Ulysseus) reported using all languages of the Universities within the alliance for written communication, e.g., the alliance website.

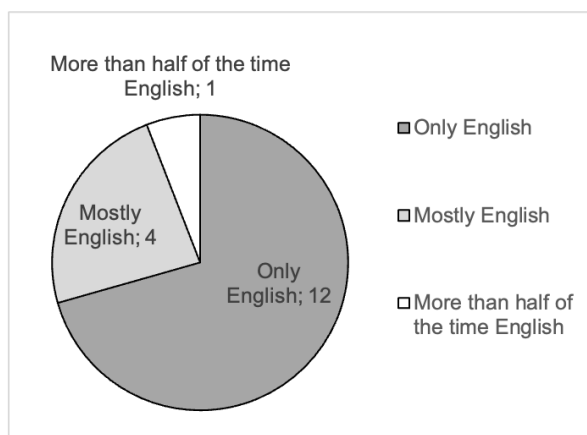


Fig.3: Which language(s) are being used for communication in meetings across universities within the alliance and what is the proportion of use of each language? [mostly English=85-98%; more than half of the time=70%]

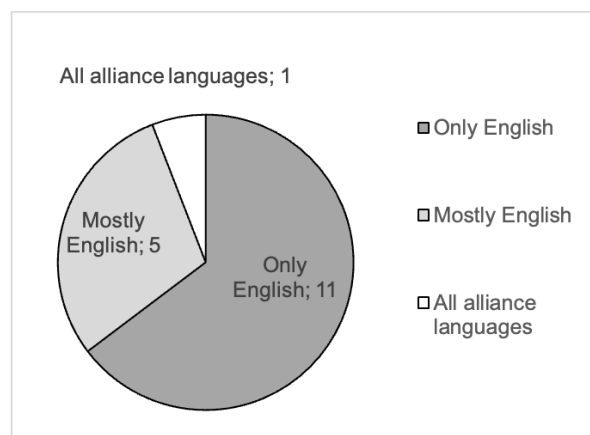


Fig.4: Which language(s) are being used for written communication in meetings across universities within the alliance and what is the proportion of use of each language? [mostly English=80-98%]

The alliances that do not use English exclusively for communication in meetings use a variety of other languages. Here are some scenarios: a) 98% English, 2% French (CircleU), b) 90% English and 10% all the other languages of the alliance (Aurora), c) 85% English, 3% German, 3% Spanish, 2% Estonian, 2% Italian, 2% Lithuanian, 2% Polish, and 1% Bulgarian (T4E), d) 70% English, 25% French, 5% Spanish or German (EUT+). Some alliances mentioned different language use depending on the type of meetings. For example, EURECA-PRO uses English exclusively in general communication meetings but in meetings across German-speaking universities, German is being used 60% and English 40%. Another alliance reports 95% use of English in general meetings but use of English and all Romance languages within the work package on multilingualism (UNITA). Ulysseus mentions using English or a national language in internal meetings inside partner universities. Finally, ERUA reports using mostly English in general alliance meetings, but French and German in bilateral exchanges, depending on the partners' language skills, and sometimes also use of Bulgarian or Greek.

A slightly different picture emerges for written communication with a higher percentage of English for written communication, fewer mentions of other languages of the alliances and French being mentioned in several alliances as

another language used for written communication in addition to English. Here are some scenarios: a) 98% English, 2% French (Circle U), b) 95% English and 5% other languages (UNITA), c) 92% English and 7 % all the other languages within the alliance (Aurora), c) 80% English, 20% French (EUT+), d) 40% English and 60% German in written communication between German-speaking universities (EURECA-PRO). Finally, one alliance mentioned that all deliverables as well as the digital platform will be in English, with the main parts translated into alliance languages, and the alliance website has been translated into all partner languages in addition to English (Ulysseus).

#### 4.5 Multilingualism within the alliance

The vast majority of the alliances (N=13) (Aurora, CircleU, EC2U, ENHANCE, ENLIGHT, ERUA, EUniWell, EURECA-PRO, EUT+, FILMEU, T4E, Ulysseus, UNITA) mentioned that multilingualism is a priority area for them and all of them were planning to organize activities on multilingualism. Most of the activities mentioned (N=21) regard teaching and learning languages:

- Language courses: 6 alliances (AURORA, ENLIGHT, EuroTeQ, EURECA-PRO, EUT+, Ulysseus)
- Intercomprehension courses: 3 alliances (AURORA, EUniWell, Unita)
- Open-up language courses between alliance partners through online learning initiatives: 2 alliances (CircleU, ENLIGHT)
- Blended courses: 2 alliances (CircleU, ENHANCE)
- Multilingual courses and exams: 1 alliance (ERUA)
- Scientific language courses: 1 alliance (AURORA)
- Intercultural communication courses: 1 alliance (EUniWell)
- Language tandems: 1 alliance (ENHANCE)
- MOOCs: 1 alliance (ENHANCE)
- Development of a joint Master Programme on multilingualism and interculturality: 1 alliance (EC2U)
- Building networks between students and teachers involved in multilingualism: 1 (CircleU)
- Language mobility assistant program: 1 alliance (ERUA)

Some activities regard policy (N=5):

- Developing a language policy/a policy paper: 2 alliances (CircleU, ERUA)
- Supporting the adoption of plurilingualism within the alliance: 1 alliance (Aurora)
- Advocating for funding to learn and use foreign languages at the partner universities: 1 alliance (CircleU)
- Promoting alliance languages, including regional, minority, minoritized through a series of events (conferences, seminars, exhibitions): 1 alliance (T4E)

Other activities (N=5) regard training/knowledge transfer and research on plurilingualism / multilingualism:

- Annual meetings/workshops on plurilingualism: 3 alliances (Aurora, CircleU, ERUA)
- Advanced training courses in plurilingualism for school teachers of foreign languages and academic staff: 1 alliance (AURORA)
- Develop a research network on multilingualism: 1 (ENLIGHT)

Finally, some alliances (N=4) were planning to develop and/or use tools supporting multilingualism:

- Development of online accommodation strategies in the form of extra material, e.g., word lists and video tutorials, for multilingual students, multilingual virtual database: 2 alliances (ENLIGHT, ERUA)
- Automated captioning: 1 alliance (ENHANCE)
- Translation and artificial speech: 1 alliance (ENHANCE)

Despite the large number of activities the alliances were planning to complete, all alliances reported that they do not know how many students within the alliance are multilingual and one alliance reported that 50% of their staff are multilingual.

Finally, alliances were asked to share their thoughts regarding the most important action on multilingualism within a EUA and to justify their answer. In line with the question regarding the planned activities of the alliances, alliances highlighted the importance of language learning, supporting and strengthening all languages equally, including regional, minority and indigenous languages, advocating for funding for language learning, promoting a second and third foreign language, and reaching a minimum B2 level on two languages apart from the mother tongue. One of the justifications for this focus on language learning was its contribution to interculturality / intercultural competence: 'Promotion of other languages at each partner university to favour interculturality.'

A second justification concerns the dominance of English:

Promoting the teaching/learning and use of other languages, rather than English, will ensure a more inclusive European University and taken on board the historical and cultural richness and diversity of all stakeholders. (ATHENA)

... the massive teaching of English, and English as used as a lingua franca, reduces the use of national languages. Moreover, the use of English makes people who do not master it enough spontaneously move away from international projects. The solution to overcome this is to massively promote second and even third foreign languages. (EUT+)

European Alliances should foster multilingualism beyond the use of EMI, supporting the use of national languages and offering language training. On top of that, intercomprehension and translanguaging can be usefully integrated to boost language acquisition and enhance the use of different languages for communication. (UNITA)

This contrasts with a utilitarian view, according to which English is the most important language and it is not necessary to develop language skills in any another language at a high level; the focus should rather be in intercultural communication:

We think that as English is the main language of the consortium, a good command of English for all our students/staff is crucial. As a native language, they will have knowledge of one of the consortium's countries local languages. It should not be the objective that they can speak fluently another language of the consortium but they should get in touch with basics of another language of the consortium, as they will have study trips to other universities within the consortium. In this line actions should focus on cultural aspects of the other country and a basic use of other languages of the Alliance. (EURECA-PRO)

A second theme relates to awareness raising about multilingualism as a resource and plurilingualism as a prerequisite for internationalisation, raising awareness on the importance of multilingualism and intercultural competence for active citizenship – given that they are profound vectors for democracy, as well as for employability – and the importance of linguistic diversity, appreciation towards all languages, as well as understanding the potential of already-existing multilingualism of students and staff inside the alliances:

I believe that a European University Alliance has an awareness raising mission to enlighten the community that nowadays multilingualism is our DNA. We should stop drawing plans about multilingual universities because we are already building them. What we need to focus on right now is what measures we should take to convey this message to our communities so that they will understand that multilingualism is a fact, not a dream. Therefore, it is important to conceptualize multilingualism as a very complex concept and to study it from various perspectives of its complexity, namely as a valuable competence for career, as a dynamic personal identity trait, as a collective societal attribute and many others. (T4E)

Develop an understanding of the importance of linguistic diversity, since it is an essential component of multiculturalism and of developing an understanding for cultural diversity and its value. This is why we are integrating our language offers in intercultural training offers as part of our mobility skills programme. (EUniWell)

A complete and quality language training, oriented towards plurilingualism (i.e., the linguistic constellations, needs and specializations of individuals) would be the ideal prerequisite for a widespread and not superficial internationalization, as well as for forms of real and in-depth cooperation between European universities, as well as for economic cooperation. To this end, it is necessary to further explore the concept of plurilingualism concerning multilingualism in their specifically European form. (Aurora)

#### 4.6 *Language technology*

The final section regarded whether alliances use language technologies to facilitate communication in multiple languages at meetings, in the administration, in written communication and/or in lectures. Only five alliances reported that they use such language technologies, i.e., DeepL for automatic translation (ENGAGE.EU, EUT+), the automatic translation tool of the Webex online meeting system (EC2U), and speech recognition software for captioning (ENHANCE: Translectures project).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the European Higher education landscape has, since the beginning of the 2000s, experienced an increase in English-taught programmes and degrees. The rationale behind this increase was the necessity to internationalise universities in the context of the development of students' and professionals' mobilities, of international knowledge transfer, and of a demand for multilingual language skills in an increasingly globalised world. Internationalisation has, thus, quite predictably reinforced world languages, but mainly the need for a common language, English, as an instrument of international trade, world diplomacy and communication. Simultaneously, globalisation has placed language issues at its core and contributed to soaring competition between universities around the world, as the importance of rankings and publication metrics demonstrates.

Meanwhile, EUAs were implemented as a means of cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe in order to improve the international competitiveness of Europe's universities and to promote European values and identity. As a cornerstone of the European citizenship project, the promotion of multilingualism and multiculturalism has been at the forefront of the EUA programme launched in 2019, initially called for by French President Macron in his September 2017 speech on the necessity to foster a sovereign, united and democratic Europe<sup>3</sup>.

Previous research showed that many EUAs took multilingualism on board when they were launched, creating programmes or work packages particularly dedicated to multilingualism (Conçeição & Zanola 2024). This was confirmed in the survey presented in this paper. Most EUAs indicated that multilingualism is a priority area for the alliance and were planning to organise actions to foster multilingualism. Most of their actions focused on language learning opportunities, mainly for their students and less often for their staff. This is also in line with previous research showing that most EUAs focus on language learning programmes, either online (MOOCs or Blended Intensive Programmes) or face-to-face in each university (e.g., Prickett 2024; Schilling et al. 2024). However, only a small number of alliances offered courses for all languages of the alliance, some alliances mentioned explicitly that they do not offer language courses for lesser-used languages, and many alliances indicated that they offer English courses, although English was not an official language of any of the Universities of their alliance. The dominance of English becomes apparent when it comes to content courses and communication within the alliance. All EUAs in our survey indicated that they offer content courses in English, some offer courses only in English, others also in the official language of the University and very few in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>

other languages of the alliance (or even in languages outside the alliances). Finally, in line with previous research, in most EUAs, English dominates both oral and written communication, as well as internal and external communication (see also Castellotti et al. 2023; Forlot forthc.). Positive examples of good practice in adopting multilingual approaches are intercomprehension initiatives that go beyond language learning (see also, Corino et al. 2024, 2025), initiatives on training/knowledge transfer and research on plurilingualism/multilingualism, initiatives to develop tools supporting multilingualism, e.g., automated captioning, and initiatives to develop a language policy. However, at the time, none of the EUAs had a formal or explicit language policy<sup>4</sup>.

The findings from our study demonstrate that without formal language policies and implementation plans that support all languages of the alliances, the linguistic and cultural diversity of EUAs is at risk, because actions regarding multilingualism may be reduced to language learning activities for the most dominant languages and English is likely to dominate scientific discourse and communication. In addition to the *de facto* inequalities created by compulsory English, particularly in terms of access to the pedagogical and professional resources offered by EUAs, the preservation of linguistically diverse public spaces within these alliances is also at stake. Official and transnational communication runs the risk of becoming restricted to English even if local and private interactions continue to thrive in local languages. And there lies a great paradox (Forlot, forthc.): EUAs form part of a broader global strategy for research and education. The opportunity seized in 2018 to unite Europeans around this major European – therefore multilingual and multicultural – educational and scientific initiative, is inevitably leading to homogenising tendencies through English as a working language and as a medium of instruction, which at this stage remains a *conditio sine qua non* for the operational viability of the project.

The findings from our survey are rather alarming because they reveal that a lack of reflection on language use within higher education and a lack of formal language policies can lead to the anglicisation of EUAs even if their members have high aspirations about multilingualism. A coordinated effort is, therefore, necessary for the urgent development of well-thought-out and effectively implemented language policies that support all languages present in EUAs. This is crucial also for the very actors – students and staff – of the alliances themselves, to guarantee their equal access to the scientific and/or professional resources in which language skills have become necessary. Enabling EUA members to work and interact in their own languages and in a diversity of languages other than English is paramount in order to respect the European

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<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, out of all EUAs, Arqus CircleU, ERUA, INGENIUM, PAIDEIA, T4E, UnaEuropa, Unite!, Ulysseus, and YUFE have developed formal language policies.

values of equality and diversity. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary for EUAs:

- 1) to reflect on their language practices and how these may conflict with their aspirations;
- 2) to develop formal language policies that aim to preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity of EUAs; and
- 3) to develop well-thought implementation plans that can be applied across all institutional domains (teaching & learning, research, governance, communication) in support of multilingualism.

Only then will it be possible to minimise the risk of the anglicisation of EUAs and maintain the linguistic and cultural diversity of EUAs. As Ricento (2014: 219) aptly points out, democratic pluralism does not necessarily entail the protection of language diversity and multilingual language use. This is the reason why managing EUAs is likely to require explicit and pro-active language planning.

### Note

The authors did not use any AI tools for the survey design, data processing, or the article writing process.

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## Appendix

### Survey Questions

#### Part A: Language policy within the alliance

1. Which alliance are you filling the survey for? [Open box]
2. Does your alliance have a language policy?  
[YES/NO/We are in the process of developing one, if YES, please provide a link / copy to the following e-mail and go to Q2 + Q3 + Q4 + Q5, if NO go to Q6]
3. Which stakeholders were involved in setting up the language policy:
  - higher administration (e.g., university management, senate, other governing body)
  - departments, institutes
  - non-academic staff (e.g., technicians, secretaries, facility management and services, University canteen)
  - language school
  - students
  - other? [please indicate]
 [multiple to choose from]
4. What resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) did the consortium allocate for the development of the language policy? [Open box]
5. What resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) did the consortium allocate for the implementation of the language policy? [Open box]
6. Does the alliance plan to develop a language policy? [YES/NO/Not sure yet]
7. Do the individual Universities of the alliance have a language policy? If so, which ones? [Open box]

#### Part B: Language use in courses within the alliance

8. Have Universities within the alliance already started to offer courses to students from other Universities within the alliance?  
[Yes/No, if YES go to Q9, if NO go to Q10]
9. Which language(s) are used in these courses?
  - Language(s) of the host country
  - Language(s) of other alliance members
  - English
  - a combination [please explain with some examples]
 [multiple to choose from and an open box]

**Part C: Language learning within the alliance**

10. Do Universities or the alliance offer language learning opportunities for students to learn the languages of the alliance?  
[YES/NO, if YES, which ones and go to Q11 / if NO, go to Q12]
11. What resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) did the Universities or the alliance allocate to the implementation of the language courses? [Open box]
12. Do Universities or the alliance plan to offer language learning opportunities for students in the future to learn the languages of the alliance? [YES/NO, if YES, for which language(s)]
13. Do Universities or the alliance offer language learning opportunities for staff to learn the languages of the alliance?  
[YES/NO, if YES, which ones and go to Q14, If NO, go to Q15]
14. What resources (e.g., personnel, budget, technology, other resources) did the Universities or the alliance allocate to the implementation of the language courses? [Open box]
15. Do Universities or the alliance plan to offer language learning opportunities for staff in the future to learn the languages of the alliance?  
[YES/NO, If YES, for which language(s)? => Open Box]

**Part D: Language use for communication within the alliance**

16. Which language(s) are being used for communication in meetings across Universities within the alliance and what is the proportion of use of each language (e.g., 50% English, 30% French, 10% Dutch, 10% Italian)?  
[Open box]
17. Which language(s) are being used for written communication across Universities within the alliance and what is the proportion of use of each language (e.g., 50% English, 30% French, 10% Dutch, 10% Italian)?  
[Open box]

**Part E: Multilingualism within the alliance**

18. Is multilingualism a priority area within the alliance? [YES/NO]
19. Are you planning any activities on multilingualism?  
[YES/NO, if yes, which ones?]
20. Do you know how many students within the alliance are multilingual?  
[YES/NO] If YES, go to 21
21. How many students within the alliance are multilingual?  
Scale from 0% to 100%
22. Do you know how many staff within the alliance are multilingual?  
[YES/NO] If YES, go to 23
23. How many staff within the alliance are multilingual?  
Scale from 0% to 100%

24. What do you think should be the most important action on multilingualism within a European University alliance and why?  
[Open Box]

**Part F: Language technology**

25. Does your alliance use any language technologies (e.g., automatic translation using AI, like DeepL Translate or Google Translate) to facilitate communication in multiple languages at meetings, in the administration, in written communication and/or in lectures?  
[YES/NO, if yes, please explain => Open box]