



THE GEOPOLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION



VENUE

COMMISSION OF THE
BISHOPS' CONFERENCES
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
(COMECE)
SQUARE DE MEEÛS 19/1
B-1050 BRUSSELS

International Conference

JUNE

12

2024

9:30 - 17:00

The Geopolitics of Higher Education

Scientific and academic diplomacy has long been a significant instrument of soft power in the hands of states, and therefore an important part of their foreign policy. This has been particularly true since the end of the Cold War, as the rise of globalization facilitated the circulation of capital, goods and people across the planet. During the next decades, universities deployed internationalization strategies that promoted study abroad programs, the transborder movement of scholars, and broad-based international research partnerships involving multiple institutions around the world. The underlying assumption behind the expansion of these exchanges was that global cooperation in research and education was both inherently and collectively beneficial.

This international environment began to change a few years ago with the emergence of new geopolitical tensions. First, illiberal trends developing in established democracies began to question the value of globalization, internationalization, and the principle of boundless academic collaboration. Second and even more significantly, the rise of China as a global power on a path to overtake the United States as the world's largest economy produced relations of competitive rivalry between the two countries, and later an atmosphere of enmity that extended to their respective allies. Russia's war against Ukraine has reinforced this trend towards a fragmentation of the global order, and the perception of a return to great-power competition.

This changing international landscape is having a profound impact on higher education around the world, regarding both student and faculty mobility, and transborder collaboration in research. To explore how the changing geopolitical order is affecting the higher education sector at global scale, the International Federation of Catholic Universities and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union are hosting this one-day event with the participation of experts, stakeholders and representatives of the European Commission.



PROGRAM

10:00 – 10:15

Opening and welcome remarks

Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto, General Secretary of COMECE

Dr. François Mabilie, General Secretary of IFCU

Keynote speech

Dr. Theresia Feldmann, Research Attaché, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the European Union

10:15-11:15 – Panel 1: The changing landscape of internationalization in higher education

This panel will provide a broad overview of how internationalization in higher education has evolved over the past 7-8 years under the impact of new challenges, in particular the changing geopolitical landscape after decades of intensified student mobility, faculty exchanges and transnational scientific collaboration. It will also address the extent to which knowledge diplomacy has become a soft power weapon increasingly used by states to gain international visibility and status in an international order now vastly shaped by the strategic competition between the United States and China and the global divide produced by Russia's war against Ukraine. In addition, it will highlight the EU agenda for the promotion of cross-border scientific cooperation.

Panelists

Hans de Wit - Professor Emeritus of the Practice; Distinguished Fellow, Center for International Higher Education, Boston College

Hannah Moscovitz - Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Danish School of Education Aarhus University; Visiting Scholar, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge; Vice-Chair of the EU COST Action 22121

Giorgio Sonnino - Adviser for Synergies between Higher Education and Scientific Research and Higher Education to the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture, European Commission; Senior Scientific Researcher, Department of Theoretical Physics and Mathematics, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Moderator - Corinne Mellul, Head of Foresight Unit, IFCU

11:15-11:30 – Coffee break

11:30-12:30 – Panel 2: Research and innovation as tools of global economic competition

This panel will focus on the role of research and innovation in the geopolitical competition between states, and in particular on the resulting global technological race. It will address the EU policy landscape of research as a driver of economic competition. It will also examine the challenges interstate global competition poses for universities and research institutes, including the issue of brain drain/brain gain, and for technological advances, including the problems of technology transfer and of data security and privacy.

Panelists

Valérie Zwilling - Deputy General Director for Internationalization at CY Cergy Paris Université; former member of the Europe and International College of the National Committee for Open Science (France)

Sylvie Matelly - Director of the Jacques Delors Institute; former deputy director of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)

Moderator - Pierre Vercauteren, Professor Emeritus, Catholic University of Louvain; Chairman of IFCU Council of Scientific Research



12:30-14:00 – Lunch

14:00-15:00 - Panel 3: Cross-border research projects as the new threat to national security

This panel will focus on the developing challenges posed by national security concerns among many governments around the world to cross-border collaborative academic programs in a repolarized global environment. It will include an overview of the new restrictions on international collaborative research projects and their impact on scientific progress in much of the world, the blurring dividing lines between civilian and military research, and how rising national security concerns across states are restricting academic freedom and reshaping the international landscape of technological research and collaboration.

Panelists

Katrien Rommens-Notoglou - Head of Unit Youth, Education, Culture at the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission

Amy Kapit - Senior Program Officer for Advocacy at Scholars at Risk

Moderator - Louis-Marie Clouet, Deputy Director for Foresight and Director of ECOPOSS, Université Catholique de Lille

15:00-15:30 – Coffee break

15:30-16:30 - Panel 4: Cultural diplomacy and the geopoliticization of higher education

This panel will focus on evolving global perceptions of international scientific and academic exchanges and their actual and potential impact on international relations, on the building of intercultural bridges and on the use of these exchanges by states to enhance their soft power, against a backdrop of rising nationalism. It will address the evolving challenges of promoting democracy and the pursuit of peace through academic exchanges, and focus on the EU as a successful exchange space and a potential counter-model.

Panelists

John Aubrey Douglass - Senior Research Fellow and Research Professor of Public Policy and Higher Education at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley; author of *Neo-Nationalism and Universities: Populists, Autocrats and the Future of Higher Education*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021

Jeffrey Saunders - CEO of Nordic Foresight; former director of the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies

Moderator - Emilio Dogliani, Adviser for Culture, Education and Youth Policy, COMECE

16:30-16:45 - Closing remarks

Emmanuel Lincot, Professor of Chinese Studies, Institut Catholique de Paris; Associate Research Fellow at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)





Scan the QR Code and Register

Dr. Corinne Mellul, IFCU's Head of the Foresight unit, focuses her work on the transformations of higher education and labor under the impact of technology.

She recently issued two foresight reports **"The Geopolitics of Higher Education" (2023)** and the **"Geopolitics of Knowledge" (2024)**.

@: corinne.mellul@bureau.fiuc.org / sgfiuc@bureau.fiuc.org

Visit our Foresight Webpage

