

Brussels, 12 May 2023

COST 031/23

DECISION

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action “Rising nationalisms, shifting geopolitics and the future of European higher education/research openness” (OPEN) CA22121

The COST Member Countries will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action Rising nationalisms, shifting geopolitics and the future of European higher education/research openness approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 12 May 2023.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA22121
**RISING NATIONALISMS, SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN HIGHER
EDUCATION/RESEARCH OPENNESS (OPEN)**

The COST Members through the present Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wish to undertake joint activities of mutual interest and declare their common intention to participate in the COST Action, referred to above and described in the Technical Annex of this MoU.

The Action will be carried out in accordance with the set of COST Implementation Rules approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), or any document amending or replacing them.

The main aim and objective of the Action is to explore how the rise of new nationalisms and geopolitical tensions exert a growing pressure on the openness of European higher education and research and examine its implications for the future of Europe. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The present MoU enters into force on the date of the approval of the COST Action by the CSO.

OVERVIEW

Summary

In the last decade, an upsurge of new nationalisms and geopolitical shifts have amplified Eurosceptic opposition and challenged the values of integration at the root of the European integration project. These transformations in the political world in which universities operate exert a growing pressure on the openness of higher education and research and are affecting academic freedom, open science, institutional autonomy, and international engagement, including mobility opportunities. The University finds itself entangled in contrasting visions of Europe: between one of deeper political integration and openness and visions where European nation-states (re) gain power as the locust of political sovereignty or where protectionism, regionalism, and security politics challenge open exchange with communities outside the EU.

The action brings together an inter-disciplinary group of researchers to explore the shifting dynamics between the University, the nation-state and the European integration project. Through knowledge-exchange and collaboration, the network will converge diverse pan-European and interdisciplinary perspectives on the neonationalism-higher education relationship and accompanying geopolitical pressures. The network will strengthen and showcase European scholarship, and liaise with stakeholders in the domain of higher education and research to generate ideas for addressing and alleviating the growing threats to the University’s openness and global cooperation capabilities. In doing so, the network will develop sustainable and transferable analytical and conceptual frameworks for future studies and collaborations, including mentorship programs for early career scholars.

<p>Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educational sciences: History and philosophy of education ● Political Science: European studies 	<p>Keywords</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● European Union ● Neo-nationalism ● Geopolitics ● Higher education ● Research
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Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective described in this MoU, the following specific objectives shall be accomplished:

Research Coordination

- Strengthen European scholarship on the EU, higher education and research policy, new nationalisms and geopolitical pressures
- Create a digital research genealogy
- Develop a comparative framework
- Develop a comparative empirical mapping
- Coordinate the dissemination of Action results to both academic and policy arenas

Capacity Building

- Promote and support academic training of YRI through training schools, colloquia and mentorship programme
- Facilitate mobility opportunities and conference participations for YRIs and researchers from less-

research intensive member countries

- Lay the groundwork for future projects
- Facilitate cross-disciplinary exchanges
- Promote synergies with the ERA's policy agenda

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1. S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1. SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

To explore and respond to the growing challenges to the openness of European higher education and research, the network builds on and extends two main scholarly themes: i) on recent challenges to European integration and the political ideals underpinning it, and ii) on the implications of new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures on European higher education and research.

Challenges to European integration and the future of Europe

The challenges and limits of European integration are the focus of a burgeoning scholarship, with the EU described as sitting at the “crossroads” (Bevenlander & Wodak 2017) between a deeper and reduced integration. While some consider it increasingly unlikely that the EU as we know it will survive the current crisis (Webber 2018), others offer a more optimistic account, arguing that while European integration is in crisis, these eroding forces are not potent enough to prompt a disintegration and should not presuppose its demise (Delanty 2021). There is nevertheless a common warning of an uncertain future for the EU, as its precarity amplifies.

Among the cited challenges to the EU’s political legitimacy and continued evolution is the rise of neo-nationalism (we use the terms new nationalisms and neo-nationalism interchangeably, drawing on Gingrich and Banks’ definition (Gingrich & Banks 2006)). **Nationalism** has proven to be a resilient ideology, both within and beyond Europe, and the understanding of the nation state as the principal actor in international relations equally resilient (Bergmann 2018). While not entirely new, nationalism has re-emerged in the post-cold war era as a reaction to transformative transnational and global developments, most notably those attributed to globalization (Gingrich & Banks 2006). The intensification of globalization in the 1990s and subsequent rise in global economic competitiveness, leading to an outsourcing of manufacturing and loss of jobs, brought a new set of challenges to an otherwise strengthened EU firmly rooted in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. In Europe, neo-nationalist movements and parties have become increasingly prevalent, as they present themselves as protectors of national interest in the face of reduced sovereignty, internationalism and socio-economic pressures brought on by globalization (Wodak & Rheindorf 2022). Although Eurosceptic and anti-EU parties have existed in Europe since the 1990s (Kriesi 2014, Schmidt, 2019), these developments are difficult to decouple from the multiple crisis afflicting the EU, including the 2008 financial crisis, the 2015 ‘migration crisis’, Brexit and, more recently, the pandemic and the war-induced inflation and energy crisis triggering anti-system attitudes and nourishing nationalist sentiments (Coman, Crespy, & Schmidt 2020).

Concomitant to these developments are rising **geopolitical pressures** linked to the idea that western-led globalization seems to have exhausted its power and is increasingly displaced by other strong economies and fast-growing consumer markets (López-Alves & Johnson 2019). Security reports extrapolates these tendencies by pointing to an increased “Westlessness” conditioning the current security environment following a decline of the West generated by *external pressures* such as geopolitical power shifts and rapid technological change, and *internal pressures* such as the rise of illiberal democracies in Western countries (Munich Security Report 2020). Current geopolitical tensions between the EU, Russia and China adds to this, impacting the openness of society which is at the very heart of the EU’s values. While encounters with different forms of crisis are not new to the EU, recent examples are described as unprecedented in terms of gravity and longevity, heightening concerns over its ability to overcome the resulting challenges (Webber 2018). This critical juncture for the EU has led to calls for a better theorisation of the process of what has been deemed European ‘disintegration’ (Vollaard 2014, Webber 2018). While EU scholars have developed a robust theorisation around integration, the conceptualization of its potential disintegration remains scarce (Webber 2018).

Implications of new nationalisms/geopolitical pressures on European higher education/research

Given the OPEN Action's focus on higher education and research as sites where new nationalisms and associated geopolitical pressures come into conflict with ideals of integration, openness, and cooperation, the network also aims to engage with and deepen the scholarship on the link between higher education and nationalism and accompanying geopolitical tensions.

Concomitant with the rise of the Westphalian nation state, the **modern university** has served important state and nation-building roles through the consolidation of elites, and later with mass education, the development of "national" higher education systems promoting national identity (de Ridder-Symoens & Ruegg 1991). At the same time, the nation-building role of the modern university is not clear-cut, as it has since its Medieval roots, been characterized by a strong cross-border, international dimension.

The harmonization of European education systems through the Bologna Process has been thoroughly researched as documented in literature reviews (Dakowska 2019). Within this scholarship, Europeanisation and globalization have been used as frames of reference for explaining the development of higher education systems and institutions. However, the **politics of re-nationalization of higher education and politicization of research** are increasingly influencing the autonomy and governance of the university in Europe, including academic freedom, open science, and international engagement. This compels the Action to push beyond the state of the art. The operationalization of this is being addressed in section 1.2. Here, the limited studies addressing the rise of new nationalisms, related geopolitical pressures, and their impact on European higher education and research is referenced.

In recent years, scholars have started to investigate the relationship between **new nationalisms and higher education**. Common to these works is the understanding that the resurgence of nationalism in the post-cold war era is prompting critical transformations to the higher education domain and rendering university internationalisation, university autonomy and freedom of research increasingly vulnerable. These studies point to a growing willingness of national politicians or governments representing different positions across the political spectrum in Europe, to influence, intervene or restrict freedom of research and universities' ability to engage internationally. In Denmark, a revived economic nationalism and desire to reduce the number of international students, has prompted the closure of English language programs (Brøgger 2023). Similar tendencies are noted in the Netherlands (Van der Wende 2021). In Poland, where neo-nationalism has sparked a 'politicization of knowledge' (Slaughter 2019), faculty members are viewed with increasing suspicion. In Hungary, the 2016 decision by the Orban government to outlaw the Central European University was a pivotal moment in the growing threats to academic freedom in the country (Pető, 2021). With higher education incorporated to a certain extent in the foreign policy agendas of the EU and Russia, countries like Moldova, find themselves positioned between "rival" external actors and competitive agendas and ideologies over higher education (Wetzinger 2022). The rise of neo-nationalist movements in Europe is described as a "wake up call" (van der Wende 2021) to universities, prompting a need for new understandings and theorisations (Dillabough 2022, van der Wende 2021).

A few studies have also explored the **politicization of research** and how the rise in nationalism and associated geopolitical tensions are circumventing the potential for science cooperation and openness (Lee and Haupt 2021, Sa and Sabzalieva 2018). Illiberal policies in some European countries have given rise to a politicization of research through a permeation of knowledge politics in foreign policy considerations. EU actions taken against Hungary's 2011 Higher Education Act have been documented, citing the amendments made 'incompatible with EU law' (Hoxhaj 2022). Through concepts of 'illiberal transformations', 'culture war', and 'authoritarian populism', other studies explore how regimes like Hungary's, seek to tame academic freedom through reforms and limitations on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the decision not to recognize Gender Studies, and the expulsion of the Central European University (Pető 2020, 2021, Ryder 2022).

Studies on the **intersection between security politics, foreign policy and research** are even more limited. A few studies have started exploring the conditions surrounding the EU's open science ambitions (Institutions for Open Societies 2022, van der Wende 2022). More research on the topic is undoubtedly needed, given the European Commission's open science vision (introduced in its 2017 report: Europe's Future: Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World) and appeal for science to be more open, accessible, global and transparent. The ambitions of openness and transparency have given rise to questions concerning with whom we can (and dare) share intellectual property prompting questions around how potential limitations to open knowledge exchange affect academic freedom. However, scholars have primarily explored the potentials of open science ambitions and how open science should be approached as a complex ecosystem towards knowledge co-creation and social innovations (Mačiulienė 2022) and not the political aspects of the security politics-open science nexus. While burgeoning, scholarship on the re-nationalization of higher education and politicization of research remain scant and a richer empirical understanding and theorisation around it is needed.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

Aim

The OPEN COST Action explores how the rise of **new nationalisms and geopolitical tensions** exert a **growing pressure on the openness of European higher education and research** and examines its implications for the **future of Europe**. Based on knowledge derived from pilot studies and preliminary discussions with policy officials in the European Commission (EC) and representatives from higher education and research interest organisations in Brussels in 2022, the Action addresses domains such as international engagement, academic freedom, and open science. With the university as a vantage point and a laboratory for understanding wider societal and political issues, the Network will advance the critical discussion on the future of the European integration project.

The OPEN Action will **facilitate knowledge-exchange** between political science scholars, notably (but not exclusively) those interested in European integration, nationalism, and democracy, and scholars of higher education and research policy. To cultivate ties between the academic community and policy-makers, network membership also includes higher education stakeholders such as international organisations and European focused advocacy and policy organisations and networks. The inclusion of a non-European higher education stakeholder ensures perspectives from outside Europe. Together, the critical mass of scholars and stakeholders formed by the Action are positioned to **generate responses** to the ways in which **rising nationalisms and shifting geopolitics** are putting the **openness** of European higher education and research, and the European integration project more broadly, at **risk**.

The OPEN Action pivots around one main research question: *How are the rise of new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures influencing the openness of European higher education and research, and what are the implications for the future of Europe?*

By posing this question, the OPEN Action resonates with the **European Research Area's (ERA) 2022-2024 Policy Agenda** foregrounding open sharing of knowledge and protection of academic freedom, ambitions outlined in the **European Commission's work program 2022** such as *A stronger Europe in the world* and *A new push for European democracy*, and the **2022 State of the Union Address** by President von der Leyen emphasizing the role of universities in protecting democracy. The Action accommodates these aims by exploring conditions for open science and freedom of research in Europe and how to further **promote** them.

Background

The university finds itself entangled in contrasting visions of Europe: between one of deeper political integration and openness and one where European nation states (re)gain power as the locusts of political sovereignty and where protectionist regionalism and security politics challenge open exchange with communities outside the EU. This **re-nationalization** of higher education and **politicization** of research, stresses that European multilateral collaboration and openness can no longer be taken for granted as post-cold war governance arrangements are readjusting and the geopolitical context transforming (Brøgger 2023).

The university provides an unparalleled lens to explore the impacts of neo-nationalism and shifting geopolitics on **the European project**. Since the founding of the first European universities in the Middle Ages, these institutions have constituted key actors in European history. Universities were instrumental in the nation-building efforts of 19th century Europe and are to this day difficult to decouple from political institutions and processes within the state. At the same time, universities have also been viewed as critical agents in deepening European integration. **The Erasmus program**, for instance, launched in 1987, continues to be viewed as a success story of the European integration project. In the late 1990s, the **Bologna Process**, with the support of the **European Commission**, solidified the role of higher education in the integration project by paving the way for the establishment of a **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**. Bringing Europe's higher education systems closer together, through standardization and comparability, the Bologna Process mirrored the integration process underway at the political level. In 2000, the **ERA** was inaugurated (revitalized starting in 2018) to promote the alignment of research policies and programs and support the mobility of researchers across Europe. Recently, the EU has strengthened its ambition to pursue a united Europe with the "**European Universities Initiative**", actively mobilizing universities and cross-border European university alliances, and the **European Education Area**, sculptured around the EHEA by expanding the Bologna goals to the remainder of the education system. Despite such initiatives, the continued evolution of these projects are increasingly threatened by rising **new nationalisms** and **geopolitical pressures**, amplifying Eurosceptic opposition against the European integration project and heightening **concern** among EU officials. This renders research collaborations on the topic all the more relevant.

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1.1. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

1.1.1. APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

To address the challenges faced by European higher education and research policy and the threats to European integration more broadly, the Action will foster systematic interdisciplinary knowledge-exchange, discussion and cooperation. This will be approached through the engagement and cross-fertilisation of two broad fields of research: **political science** and specifically the politics around European integration, and **higher education and research policy studies**. Bringing these fields together and developing points of interaction between them, the Action contributes innovative insights in four major ways:

Advancing the understanding of the (policy) impact of the threat against openness in European higher education and research

The broad literature on Euroscepticism, populism and European (dis)integration is for the most part focused on how these play out in the party politics of EU member states and the public opinions surrounding them. More research focused on the impact of these anti-EU values and movements on European policy is needed. The OPEN Action will address this **lacuna** through a **thorough examination** of how new nationalisms and the anti-EU sentiment underpinning it, are affecting higher education and research policy in Europe. In this way, the network will answer the call to analyse and theorise how opposition to European integration has impacted both the direction of EU policy and domestic European politics, including higher education and research politics, over time. As previously demonstrated, studies on the intersection between **security politics/foreign policy** and research are limited. At the European level, a tendency towards regionalism can be observed, for instance in the establishment of an EU *internal* market for knowledge based on security politics rationales. The OPEN Action will address the consequences of this **regionalisation** of the **open science** ambitions and the political conditions and decisions underpinning them. While research and exchange on these themes are scant, a few university-based initiatives such as the Utrecht University's "Institutions for Open Societies"-initiative have taken up the challenge. The OPEN Action will connect with these initiatives and provide analysis and knowledge exchange on how academic freedom can be protected and enhanced in a world in which the core values of openness in higher education and research are being challenged.

Introducing a comparative analysis on the impact of the threat against openness in European higher education and research

New nationalisms and shifting geopolitics have different implications for universities in different world regions (Douglass 2021). With comparative approaches on the topic lacking, European scholarship is well positioned to take up this task as researchers from across the region delve into questions around the precarity of higher education systems and democracy in different national contexts. The important role played by **higher education** in the **European integration** project also affirms the value of deepening our understanding on how challenges to this integration process affects the university sector in variegated ways. Questions around **open science** initiatives are also of heightened relevance in the EU context. Generating timely comparative insight into how open science is addressed and challenged can contribute to this ever-pressing issue for the EC and ERA. This approach also has high potential to showcase European scholarship and raise its visibility, particularly in the field of higher education and research studies. By incorporating a pan-European comparative element to the network's research activities, the Action will foster a **deeper critical engagement** with the idea of new nationalisms and shifting geopolitics and thus help ascertain a better understanding of the scope and implications for universities, including insights into the specificities, contradictions and commonalities of the phenomena at large, and on the EU more broadly.

Promoting theorisation of the threats against openness in European higher education/research

The Action also seeks to advance a theoretical understanding of the connection between new nationalisms and geopolitical pressures on higher education and research, identifying key **determinants** all the while contributing to a **context-specific** understanding of how these interrelate. While the study of the role of school-level education for nationalism has been more widely explored, the connection to higher education specifically has gained much less scholarly attention. This is partly attributed to the fact that higher education studies have focused heavily on issues of globalization and internationalization leaving the discussion of the significance of nationalism somewhat under the radar (Koch 2014). The recent academic interest in the impact of new nationalism on higher education is an important step to promoting a more refined understanding of this relationship. The relative dearth of scholarship on the link between security politics/foreign policy and the politicization of research also renders the theorisation around these threats all the more relevant. The network will be uniquely positioned to contribute to this growing body of literature through the creation of a research genealogy tracing the historical continuities

and breaks in the relationship between the European nation state, integration politics, and the university (WG1), and the coordination of context-sensitive comparative and empirical studies (WG2-3). These also have the potential to shed light on possible gendered aspects of current Central European illiberal transformations (Grzebalska & Pető 2018). This theoretical exercise will in turn offer valuable insight on the institutional role of the university in European society, and in the understanding of the future of Europe and its political integration.

Promoting an inter-disciplinary perspective

By bringing together a **critical mass of scholars** from an intentionally diverse range of disciplines, the network will support and invigorate the interdisciplinary approaches to both **higher education and European integration studies**. The Action is designed in such a way to facilitate **cross-fertilisation** between higher education and research studies and European integration studies. As two inherently interdisciplinary fields, bridging these will also prompt synergies between the broader disciplines of political science, education studies, history, economics, and sociology. Equally important is the need to draw parallels between the often-divided studies on higher education policy on the one hand, and research policy on the other. Preliminary discussions with **policy officials in the EC** and numerous representatives from **higher education and research interest organisations** in Brussels in **preparation for this application**, stressed the need to include the interlinkage between higher education and research in matters concerning the potential threats against openness. At its core, the Action advances an understanding of the politics of higher education and research, bridging political science and theory to the study of knowledge policy.

1.1.2. OBJECTIVES

1.1.2.1. *Research Coordination Objectives*

- 01 Strengthen and **showcase European scholarship** on the EU, higher education and research policy, new nationalisms and geopolitical pressures by consolidating a network of **researchers from diverse fields**- primarily but not exclusively- bridging between political science (highlighting the politics around European integration) and higher education policy studies, to pool resources and expertise, and promote interdisciplinary approaches.
- 02 Create a **digital research genealogy and theorisation** bringing together higher education and political science studies, to trace how the modern European university became entangled in nation state politics and political projects promoting integration and international alliances.
- 03 Developing a **transferable comparative** framework based on an **ethics of context sensitivity**, for additional studies on the future of European higher education and research areas and of the EU.
- 04 Develop a **comparative empirical mapping** and analyse data across different domains of impact to understand the variegated and context-specific facets of the effects of new nationalisms and geopolitical pressures on European higher education and research.
- 05 Coordinate the **dissemination of Action results** to both academic and policy arenas, including a **position paper** between academics and stakeholders on academic freedom criteria.

1.1.2.2. *Capacity-building Objectives*

- 08 Promote and support the **academic training of Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI)** through training schools (3), colloquia (4) and a mentorship program led by a Mentorship Coordinator.
- 09 Facilitate **mobility opportunities** and **conference participations** for YRIs and researchers from less-research intensive member countries by sharing research infrastructures and capacities.
- 10 Laying the **groundwork for future projects** and research paths between participants and beyond, including potential groundwork for a proposal for Horizon Europe funding.
- 11 Facilitate **cross-disciplinary exchanges** on common themes towards the development of innovative approaches to understanding how new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures affect European higher education and research.
- 12 Promote **synergies** with the **ERA's** policy agenda (2022-2024) and its priority area concerning the internal market for knowledge, including open science ambitions and the protection of academic freedom in Europe.

2. NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

2.1. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

2.1.1. ADDED VALUE IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The OPEN Action will develop a first of its kind research network on questions surrounding threats against the openness of higher education and research posed by rising new nationalisms and current geopolitical shifts. With these developments happening relatively recently and given the timeliness of questions around its implications for higher education and research, studies on these topics as outlined above, remain limited. It follows that organized research networks, including COST actions exploring the openness of higher education and research in relation to European integration, are non-existent. In this way, the OPEN Action will fill a much-needed void and provide timely insight into an ever-salient phenomenon. The Action will liaise with several ongoing research projects and initiatives, which explore similar or adjacent themes to its own. These projects have been launched within the last two years and are currently ongoing, adding further evidence to the timeliness of the Action.

At the European level, an important effort to explore the impact of new nationalisms on higher education policy is being advanced through the “**Asserting the Nation**” research project, funded by Independent Research Fund Denmark (2021-2025). The project explores the relation between the (nation) state, the university and the EU, including how new nationalisms have affected national higher education policy in Poland, France, Denmark and the UK. It also examines recent EU policies affecting European higher education and research. The project resonates with OPEN’s agenda and will provide important examples and insights on the threats against the openness of higher education and research. By providing a broader platform for collaboration with a larger list of European countries to analyse, the OPEN Action adds significant weight to this existing research and paves the way for close European collaboration and for advancing European scholarship.

The UK’s Economic and Social Research Council funded project “**Higher Education, States of Precarity and Conflict in the 'Global North' and 'Global South': UK, Hungary, South Africa, and Turkey**” (2021-2024), explores the current state of crisis incurred on universities around the world and investigates what they mean for the capacity of higher education to fulfill its public mission. Focusing on a broader range of issues affecting the state of precarity of universities today, including populism, neoliberalism and territorial conflict, the project provides a valuable platform for collaboration and anchoring the network’s focus on threats against openness in higher education and research in wider issues affecting the university today. The OPEN Action will draw on the knowledge acquired through this project and foster collaboration and new lines of inquiry on shared themes.

The “**Institutions for Open Societies**” initiative, launched in 2022, at Utrecht University is related but much broader in scope and includes how formal and informal institutions are able to cope with challenges such as growing socio-economic inequality, the power of “big tech”, the climate crisis, terrorism and discrimination and distrust in government and science. However, it also involves research on the vulnerability of open systems, including the university and how this openness currently seems be jeopardized by illiberal trends. The initiative provides a valuable opportunity for collaboration and may enable joint activities such as training schools.

There are also several standing groups in the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR), such as **Knowledge Politics and Policies** and the **European Union**, which are associated to the Action’s broader themes on higher education and research policy and studies on European integration. The European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) also includes valuable research groups on **higher education**. Efforts will be made to cultivate links with these groups. There are also global knowledge spaces with which OPEN will consolidate links, including the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) and the International Studies Association (ISA). These will provide valuable spaces to engage and disseminate findings throughout the Action, as well as generate interest outside Europe to the project and its goals.

A major differentiating factor of the **OPEN COST Action** is its predication on a network model, which allows for not only a larger consortium of researchers from a broad geographical scope but also a more diverse interdisciplinary arrangement. Through meetings and conferences, a mentorship program and annual colloquia for early career scholars and other activities, the OPEN Action will bring together higher education and research studies and European integration studies and thereby facilitate a cross-fertilization of ideas across broader disciplines such as political science, education studies, history, economics, and sociology. The Action will also reach out to and engage with contacts outside Europe to allow a wider perspective on the issues at stake.

2.2. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1. SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS, EXPERTISE AND GEOGRAPHICAL BALANCE WITHIN THE COST MEMBERS AND BEYOND

The initial group of proposers is comprised of 42 representatives from 38 COST participating countries, including 36 **full member countries**, one **near neighbouring country**, and one **cooperating member**. **59.5 %** of represented countries are **ITCs**, and include two new eligible partners for COST as of 2022. The network also includes **stakeholders outside universities**, with expertise and vested interest in the issues pursued by the Action, including two EU level network organisations, and one international organisation working in higher education policy advocacy. The Network is also expected to grow, with additional researchers and organisations continuously entering the Action. This is supported through systematic stakeholder outreach in year 1 conducted by WG4. New members will be assigned a working group. The composition of the network reflects four features of its “added value”.

Interdisciplinarity

The network is distributed mainly between **political science researchers** (focusing on European studies, democracy, nationalism), and **higher education scholars**. This allows for a strong cross-fertilization between fields and has potential to advance both. Consolidating a critical mass of political science scholars with higher education scholars is also aimed at advancing the until now scant field of research covering the politics of higher education. It will also support the development of higher education studies in countries lacking such focus.

Geographical scope

The network offers a **broad geographic scope** including countries dispersed throughout the EU and beyond. Countries represented in the Action are proportioned between **Northern Europe, Western Europe, the Mediterranean region, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Baltic region**. The issues addressed in this Action affect the whole of Europe, and as such addressing them requires a Europe-wide approach and analysis. Given the network’s emphasis on context-sensitive approaches to nationalism and geopolitical pressures and their impact on higher education/research, as well as the strong comparative approach it seeks to promote, including a range of countries from diverse socio-political, regional backgrounds and with distinct relationships vis a vis the EU is of immense value. The inclusion of an international organisation in the partnership provides the network with the potential to both learn from and share insights with world regions beyond Europe.

Young Researchers and Innovators

The main proposers are recognisant of the importance of supporting the work and opportunities of **early career** researchers and have designed the initial network with this in mind. **35.7 %** are at the early stages of their academic careers and it is expected that **at least one third of leadership positions** in the Management Committee (MC) will be filled by early career scholars. By facilitating collaborations between researchers at different stages of their career, the network provides a space for mutual support and learning between leading scholars on higher education and European integration, and an emerging generation of thinkers working at the cusp of these issues and generated novel perspectives and knowledges.

Gender

Finally, the network is comprised of a large **majority of female academics** (app. 80%). As female researchers are typically the underrepresented gender in European research, exceeding a gender balance in their favour was intentionally actioned. Given the statistics pointing to female researchers only representing “one third of researchers at the European level” (European Commission, She Figures Report 2021), the network aims to do its part in increasing the participation of women, particularly YRI, in leading research and teaching positions. Having consolidated female researchers’ participation, as the network grows, the Action will strive for a 50-50 gender balance.

2.2.2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Action’s core stakeholders are wide-ranging with vested interests and commitments to European higher education and research and/or European integration. Exploratory discussions with potential stakeholders confirm a need to take stock of the impacts of new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures on the evolution of the European higher education and research areas. There is a **shared concern among stakeholders** reached out to in preparation for this application, of the growing risks to the openness of higher education and research in Europe.

Current stakeholders (included in Action proposal):

- **University networks and associations** at European level working towards influencing and shaping European higher education and research policies (2).
- **University networks and associations** outside Europe working towards influencing and shaping global higher education and research agendas (1).

Potential stakeholders (to be included):

- **University networks and associations** at national levels, per advice from COST country participants, working towards influencing and shaping European higher education and research policies.
- **Student associations/unions** working at European level to promote student interests in the development of university policies and practices.
- **EU and national policy officials** working within the higher education and research policy domains or more general EU issues.
- **Business organisations** engaged in consultations and collaborations relating to European competitiveness, labour market/university nexus.

At the application stage, the network has secured the participation of three key stakeholder organisations, including two at the EU level and one international organisation, each involved in policy advocacy around higher education. The Network will also invite new stakeholders to become members of the consortium as it grows through planned and coordinated action by WG4 dedicated to dissemination and stakeholder outreach (WG4 lead will serve as Science Communication Coordinator). Given the Action's commitment to translate Action results and evidence to benefit policy and practice, these stakeholders are indispensable to the Network's success as well as its potential for sustainability. Efforts will be made throughout the Action's timeline to promote the network's vision, objectives and results to a large number of stakeholders.

Specific activities to this end will be conducted by WG4 and include:

- A stakeholder mapping exercise undertaken at the first WG4 meeting to identify new stakeholders.
- A systematic stakeholder outreach will be devised and put in action year 1.
- Bridging research and policy events: Network activities, such as the roundtable, geared towards promoting collaboration and mutual discussion between the Network's researchers and stakeholder organisations (see Implementation section 4.1).
- The co-drafting of a position paper between scholars and stakeholders and their dissemination.

3. IMPACT

3.1. IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAK-THROUGHS

3.1.1. SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS (INCLUDING POTENTIAL INNOVATIONS AND/OR BREAKTHROUGHS)

Scientific impact:

- The development of a **breakthrough theoretical and comparative framework** to assess the impacts of new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures on higher education and research. The innovative feature of these frameworks could only be possible through coordination in a broad European network. These will provide future projects and research with a well-established basis for continued investigation.
- The accumulation of **novel evidence** facilitated by comparative insight to understand the EU's state of precarity, through a focused perspective on the university.
- A **strengthened interdisciplinary** lens on the study of higher education and research, bridging different bodies of scholarship for common gain.
- The **consolidation of the under-developed field** of "politics of higher education" with potential for breakthrough theorisation in this field.
- The development of a focal point of knowledge exchange and **digital resource repository** on the relationship between neo-nationalism, geopolitical pressures, and the university for European scholarship to thrive.

Socioeconomic impact:

- Contribute to a **better understanding of the university's role in society** and its potential for the development of European society and progression of European integration and openness.
- Providing **evidence-based policy insight** on issues around freedom of research and freedom of expression, and open science, in Europe's higher education and research area.
- Contribute, through systemic analysis and comparative data, to the determination of **policy measures** to address the challenges faced by universities amid the rise of new nationalisms and related geopolitical pressures.
- **Support the European Commission's** initiatives towards strengthening European democracy including the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan, and the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022).
- **Contribute to the ERA's** priority concerning open science through the promotion of open access outputs and sharing of research infrastructures between partners.

3.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Several measures will be undertaken in the OPEN Action to strengthen the impact of the network's research collaborations, exchanges, and deliverables. In terms of **knowledge creation**, the network will facilitate the collaborative development of rich theoretical, comparative, and empirical accounts of the impact of rising neo-nationalism and related geopolitical tensions on European higher education and research and European integration more broadly. Through coordination, knowledge exchange, and collaborative work between European scholars specialising in issues around European integration, higher education and nationalism, the network will culminate in novel comparative and theoretical frameworks, which can be relied on in future research and projects. The Action includes activities geared towards the **transfer of knowledge** to public, academic and policy actors. This will be achieved through:

- The production of a **Network website** to systematically present the progress and results of activities, providing a key tool for international visibility, including a **resource repository**.
- The embedding of a **Network blog** to the website in which entries will be published by network members.
- The organisation of inclusive events and spaces for **knowledge exchange open to the general public** and designed in such a way to promote a wide participation (including webinars).
- The production of joint and individual **scientific publications** by network members. Publications made within the framework of the project will be in open access formats as much as possible.
- The delivery of **conference presentations/panels**, and Action training **school material**.
- The elaboration and dissemination of a **position paper** on academic freedom criteria, including bottom-up recommendations to share with EC officials, and higher education stakeholders.
- The **dissemination of Action results** through media and social media (established Twitter account).

OPEN also includes a strong **career development** component, geared primarily towards the network's early career researchers. The network plan of activities includes three **training schools** for postgraduates and early career scholars, short term scientific missions to provide scholars with the opportunity to pursue their projects with the insights and guidance of experts in their fields, an annual "peer-to-peer" **colloquium** for YRIs (starting year 2) to collaborate and gain feedback on their work, and the designation of a conference fund to support the dissemination of research from ITCs. The design of career development activities for the Network also considers the need to promote **sustainable arrangements**, which can extend beyond the timeline of the project itself (also see risk analysis, 4.1.3). Thus, the Action will also include a **mentorship program** in which YRIs will have the opportunity to be paired with senior researchers. The program will be supported in part by the STSMs organised as part of the Action, allowing the paired mentor-mentees to meet for joint work (either in person or virtually through virtual mobility grants where needed). The mentorship program will be administered by a designated Mentorship Program Coordinator, and YRI network member on the MC Core Group.

3.2.2. PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY

The dissemination of objectives, tasks/activities and deliverables will accompany the network's actions from the launch of the project (WG4). Dissemination and exploitation plans are geared towards the scientific community (and potential new members), the general public, as well as the policy making arena (EU officials, higher education policy actors). Planned activities for showcasing the project and engaging in dialogue with these stakeholders include:

- The creation of a **network website** with up-to-date information on the project, its rationale, activities, results, and deliverables and an embedded **blog site** for systematic publishing of ideas on the Future of European higher education and research.
- The creation of a **resource repository** containing a syllabus bank of relevant courses taught by members and teaching and training materials and the collection and dissemination of project outputs, and an **interactive digital research genealogy** shedding light on the historical continuities and breaks in the European nation state-university relationship
- The publication of **scientific articles** by network members in open access journals and formats.
- The presentation of Action and research results at **annual OPEN Conference** and third-party conference panels.
- Peer-to-Peer YRI **colloquium** (incorporated to annual OPEN conference)
- 2 annual **webinars** – recorded and uploaded to website: virtual events allowing for wider participation and high potential for dialogue with the public, and various stakeholders.
- The presentation of results and evidence to policy actors through a **roundtable** organised by WG4 aimed at bringing stakeholders and scholars together to discuss and develop criteria on academic freedom in a joint position paper.
- The presentation of results and evidence to policy actors through **after-work-meetings** at **national and EU parliamentary level**.

Important efforts will be made to promote **inclusivity** and **diversity** in the Action's dissemination activities. This goal, coupled with the Action's intention to be mindful of the environmental impact of activities (in line with the European Green Deal objectives), lead to the design of both hybrid and virtual events throughout the course of the funding period. WG meetings will also be intentionally scheduled to coincide with MC meetings, in order to reduce members' carbon footprint. The network will also work towards promoting open science initiatives and values by promoting the publication of articles in **open access** formats and by aiming to accommodate the **FAIR** principles. The position papers developed, as well as frameworks and resources emerging from the Action will be made publicly available via the project website and resource repository. The dissemination plan will also be geared towards ensuring the **exploitation of Action results** making the research genealogy and comparative framework available and transferable. These results and outputs can be used and relied upon in future research, and in this way promote the sustainability of the Action. Through knowledge transfer activities with policy actors, the network will also produce position papers on criteria for academic freedom, which will be shared with European Commission officials.

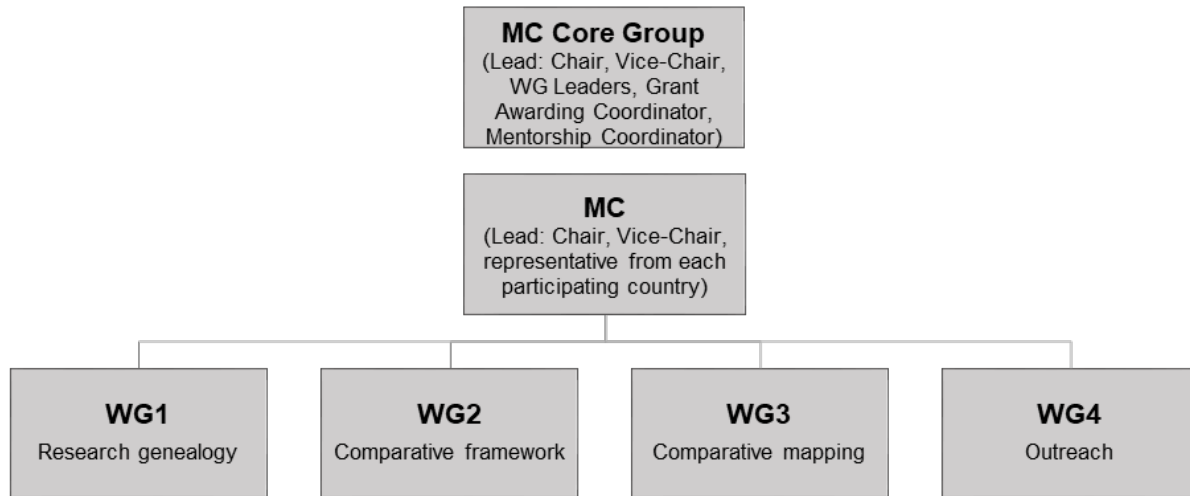
4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN

4.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

The Action is made up of **four Working Groups (WG)**, working on interrelated facets of the higher education- neoneationalism relationship and implications for European integration. Each working group will be led by two members of the Network (if possible at least one from ITC and one YRI). The **Management Committee (MC)** will oversee the Network activities and be led by the Action Chair and Vice-Chair (preferably an YRI). The Committee will be comprised of at least one representative from each participating COST country and will meet twice a year to discuss the Action's development and address budgetary issues. The **MC Core Group** will include the Action Chair and Vice-Chair, WG leaders, a Grant Awarding Coordinator and a Mentorship Program Coordinator. At least one-third of the core members will be YRI, and app. 60% of the positions will be held by representatives of ITCs. The Core Group will meet four times a year (twice following MC general meeting, twice virtual) and spontaneously as needed.

Management structure:



Management Committee (MC)	
Objectives	Tasks
O1/O5/O7/O8/O9/O10/O11/O12/O12 (see 1.1.2)	T.1. Organize kick-off meeting T.2. Organize MC meetings (2/year) T.3. Organize MC Core Group meetings (2/year) T.4. Organize annual OPEN Conference T.5. Monitor and oversee the budget T.6. Coordinate and oversee the Network activities T.7. Coordinate and oversee STSMs, VMG (grant awarding) and mentorship program T.8. Liaise with WG leaders T.9. Follow-up on milestones: Conduct yearly formative evaluation and final summative evaluation

Working group structure:

WG1: Research genealogy: <i>bringing together higher education and political science studies</i>		
Dual WG lead: if possible with one ITC represented and one YRI		
Objectives	Tasks	Deliverables
O1/O2/O5/O8/O9/O11/O12 (see 1.1.2)	T.1.1 Create research genealogy and develop theorisation T.1.2 Organize WG meetings (2/year) T.1.3 Organizing EC training school 1 T.1.4 Prepare and design webinars T.1.5 Engage in STSMs and VMG T.1.6 Organize and prepare presentations and panels for annual OPEN + third party conferences	D.10 Interactive digital research genealogy D.5 EC training school and materials D.9 Peer-reviewed journal articles (2) D.12 Contribution to joint COST Action edited volume D.7 Webinar recordings (2) D.2 Blog entries/year (2)

WG2: Comparative framework: <i>developing an ethics of context sensitivity</i>		
Dual WG lead: if possible with one ITC represented and one YRI		
Objectives	Tasks	Deliverables
O1/O3/O5/O8/O9/ O11/O12 (see 1.1.2)	T.2.1 Develop a comparative framework based on an ethics of context sensitivity T.2.2 Organise WG meetings (2/year) T.2.3 Organizing EC training school 2 T.2.4 Prepare and design webinars T.2.5 Engage in STSMs and VMG T.2.6 Organize and prepare presentations and panels for annual OPEN + third party conferences	D.11 Comparative framework D.5 EC training school and materials D.9 Peer-reviewed journal articles (2) D.12 Contribution to joint COST Action edited volume D.7 Webinar recordings (2) D.2 Blog entries/year (2)
WG3: Comparative empirical mapping: <i>analyzing evidence across different domains of impact</i>		
Dual WG lead: if possible with one ITC represented and one YRI		
Objectives	Tasks	Deliverables
O1/O4/O5/O8/O9/ O11/O12 (see 1.1.2)	T.3.1 Analyse and consolidate empirical evidence T.3.2 Organize WG meetings (2/year) T.3.3 Organizing EC training school 3 T.3.4 Prepare and design webinars T.3.5 Engage in STSMs and VMG T.3.6 Organize and prepare presentations and panels for annual OPEN + third party conferences	D.5 EC training school and materials D.9 Peer-reviewed journal articles (2) D.12 Contribution to joint COST Action edited volume D.7 Webinar recordings (2) D.2 Blog entries/year (2)
WG4: Outreach: <i>cross-fertilization between research and policy</i>		
Dual WG lead: if possible with one ITC represented and one YRI (WG4 lead: Science communication coordinator)		
Objectives	Tasks	Deliverables
O5/O6/O8/O9/O11/O12 (see 1.1.2)	T.4.1 Identify and reach out to new stakeholders, especially more researchers from ITC countries T.4.2 Organize WG meetings (2/year) T.4.3 Communicating and showcasing Action results. T.4.4 Designing and updating project website and blog T.4.5 Organise Early career scholars' colloquia T.4.6 Assist Grant Awarding and Mentorship Program Coordinator with dissemination and platform. T.4.7 Organize joint roundtable T.4.8 Reporting and policy advise to EU and national parliaments	D.1 OPEN website D.2 OPEN blog D.3 Stakeholder mapping outline D.4 Mentorship program platform D.6 Resource Repository D.8 Joint scholar-stakeholder position paper on criteria for academic freedom D.12 Contribution to joint COST Action edited volume.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

Deliverable	Description	Timeframe
D1: OPEN website	The Network website will provide information on the Action's objectives, activities and events. Managed by WG 4.	Start: Month 1
D2: OPEN Blog	A blog and podcast series will be integrated into the Action website. Network members will be invited to contribute entries (1/ month) in the blog on themes related to the Action and to create podcasts. Members participating in STSMs and VMGs will be encouraged to submit blog entries following their mobility period. Managed by WG 4	Start: Month 6
D3 Stakeholder Analysis Outline	Following the Stakeholders Analysis meetings, a document will be produced by WG4 identifying various stakeholders and the Network's plans for engaging them in the Action, especially focusing on ITC researchers, policy officials, European parliament members	Month 3
D4 Mentorship program online platform	The Network's mentorship program will be supported by an online platform, incorporated into the project website. During the course of the Action this platform will be password protected for members of the network to access. It is envisioned that the platform will then become publically available after the funding period.	Start: Month 1 Launch: Month 10 Opened to the public in month 48.
D5 Training school content	Training schools for YRI will be organised by WG1-3. The materials and content for the training will be made available.	Start: Month 21
D6 Resource Repository	A section of the website will be dedicated to collecting resources for future use and application – including the research genealogy and comparative framework developed, training school content, a collection of syllabi on related topics.	Start: Month 8. Launch: Month 24. Publically available: Month 48 (will provide phase 2 for the Network website).
D7 Webinar recordings	Recordings of the WG webinars will be made available on the project website (2/year).	Start: Year 2
D8 Joint scholar-stakeholder position paper on criteria for academic freedom. "Measuring academic freedom"	The roundtable bringing together scholars and stakeholders (organised by WG4) will provide a forum to discuss and elaborate criteria for academic freedom, including perspectives on institutional autonomy and higher education governance. The roundtable will culminate in one joint paper to disseminate. This will serve as 'bottom-up' policy advice for the European Commission's ongoing work on the protection of academic freedom.	Start: Year 4
D9 Scientific Publications	Network participants will publish both single and co-authored peer reviewed articles, all publications made in framework of the project will be open access as much as possible WG1-4 (2 articles per WG)	Start: Month 12.

D10 Interactive Digital Research Genealogy	Co-created by scholars of higher education/ research and political science (notably EU, democracy and nationalism) scholars, the genealogy (led by WG1) will promote a bridging between disciplines and a stronger theorisation around the politics of higher education and research, and its current simultaneous 're-nationalisation' and exposed position in matters relating to geopolitics. This genealogy will be compiled in a digital archive, which will include the identification of key historical events, terms and categories, and linking to key resources. Members will be able to contribute to the digital archive which will be embedded in the resource repository.	Start: Month 1 Launch: Month 24.
D11 Comparative Framework based on an ethics of context sensitivity	A comparative framework will be developed based on the work and knowledge exchange conducted by WG2. This will be made available via scientific publications.	Start: Month 1 Finish: Month 24
D12 Edited Volume on the current challenges and future prospects for EU higher education and research policy	Network members will be invited to contribute to an edited volume. The volume will be coordinated by WG 1.	Finish: Month 48
D13 Foundation for joint proposals for funding of new research projects	Towards the end of the project, new project ideas will be developed and the foundation for new proposals established, including for a Horizon Europe research fund.	Start: Month 37

4.1.3. RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

External risks	Probability	Contingency Plan
Mobility restraints due to Covid-19	Moderate	Many of the project activities are designed in a hybrid format. Shift some in person meetings to virtual where threats occur. Emphasise action activities not necessitating mobility (mentorships, VM, webinars, podcast)
Geopolitical shifts and impacts on participating countries	Moderate	Allow hybrid participation where needed.
Carbon footprint	High	Encourage greener modes of travel such as train, and optional carbon offsetting and thereby supporting the European Green Deal. Organize virtual meetings and in-person meetings, schedule in person meetings to coincide as well as with third party conferences.
Internal risks	Probability	Contingency plan
Challenges to effective coordination of a large (and growing) network	Low	Conduct formative evaluations and bi-monthly follow-ups with WG leaders. In case of lack of involvement of WG leaders or participants replacements can be appointed.
Difficulties setting up digital infrastructure (website, blog, mentorship platform)	Low	Use free software and make use of digital infrastructure and IT support at involved universities.

Risk of perpetuating methodological nationalism and methodological globalism in research	Moderate	The research team will embark on a so-called <i>multi-scaled</i> approach beyond methodological nationalism and globalism, emphasizing phenomena that transgress the nation states, while also considering the local, regional implications.
Risks associated with research ethics	Low	The comparative task conducted by network members (WG3 specifically) will rely on ethical modes of comparison (Sobe 2018).
Risks associated with cultural translation	Moderate	All participants must pay attention to cultural translations/differences between member countries.
Insufficient support of scientific sustainability	Low	The core deliverables in the project such as the website, the resource depository, including a digital genealogy, and the mentorship program platform are sustainable formats ensuring that the network will live on after the funding expires.
Risks associated with data protection and openness in research	Low	Data collected in each country will be stored in accordance with GDPR compliance rules and follow national regulations (based on EU law). The Action will encourage members to meet the FAIR principles and explore the possibilities of FAIRyfying by making metadata open and findable.

4.1.4. GANTT DIAGRAM

Year	Year 1, 2024				Year 2, 2025				Year 3, 2026				Year 4, 2027			
MC/Management																
Kick-off meeting																
MC Core group meetings																
MC meetings													D13			
Yearly OPEN Conference																
Milestones: Formative evaluations																
Summative evaluation																
WG1, 2, 3 (Genealogy, comparative framework and empirical mapping)																
T.1.1. Research genealogy							D9		D10						D9	
T.2.1. Comparative framework							D9				D11				D9	
T.3.1. Comparative analysis															D9	
T.1/2/3.2. WG meetings																
T.1/2/3.3. EC training school											1.D5				2.D5	
T.1/2/3.4. Webinars											D7	D7			D7	D7
T.1/2/3.5. STSM & VMG							D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2	D2
T.1/2/3.6. Conference panels																
WG4 (Outreach)																
T.4.1. New stakeholders																
T.4.2. WG meetings																
T.4.3. Action results																
T.4.4. Project website and blog																
T.4.5. YRI colloquia																
T.4.6. Grant awarding and mentorship																
T.4.7. Liaising and roundtables																
T.4.8. Reporting and policy advice																