Statement on the European Universities Networks

UAS4EUROPE, the networking platform for universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Europe, presents its statement on European Universities Networks. The idea of 'encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities'' is generally supported by UAS4EUROPE, if such an initiative provides for a better link between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). In this statement, UAS4EUROPE would like to point out three aspects of critical importance.

Ensure diversity among and within European Universities Networks
To ensure that European Universities Networks do not become silos or closed clubs, UAS4EUROPE encourages the European Commission (EC) to foster the creation of networks composed of institutions with different profiles, covering all three areas of education, research and innovation. The new instrument will only be able to realise its full potential, if the full diversity of European Higher Education Institutions is considered. Hence, European Universities Networks should not be restricted to purely research-intensive universities, but also allow participation of UAS and universities of teacher education, which can contribute through practice-oriented and applied science experience. European University Networks should be based on a definition of excellence that also includes practice-oriented learning outcomes, employability, and regional impact. Through their focus on training talents for the labour market, supporting regional innovation ecosystems, and pursuing cutting-edge applied research, UAS are key actors for European Universities Networks. Within this context, UAS4EUROPE would also like to encourage broad European cooperation, and advises not to limit the participation in such networks to EU member states. Due consideration should also be given to countries associated to Horizon 2020 to benefit from their expertise and foster open science.

Fostering the linkage between the EHEA and the ERA
UAS4EUROPE encourages the EC to better link the EHEA and the ERA through such European Universities Networks. To truly establish the knowledge triangle, the three areas education, research and innovation should all be given due importance. A possible pilot scheme funded under Erasmus+ should already take this into consideration. UAS act as a bridge between the ERA and the EHEA by providing practice-oriented education, applied research and services to SME and public authorities in the region. Thus, UAS4EUROPE recommends ensuring them a strong place within this new instrument.

Develop flexible, bottom-up networks
The European Universities Networks should be as flexible as possible in what they fund and thus allow for bottom-up initiatives, according to the characters and needs of each network. UAS4EUROPE stresses the importance of achieving an additional added value with such networks, especially compared to existing structures, such as the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Technology (EIT). UAS4EUROPE is convinced that flexibility will be key to foster innovative approaches. Moreover, the EC should consider making the eligibility criteria as least restrictive as possible and foster the bottom-up establishment of networks.