

CATCH-UP

A STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE



ERUA SUMMIT 2025
ERUA DAY 2025
RESEARCH
ERUA EXPERIENCE
SUSTAINABILITY
AND MORE!

LIST OF ACRONYMS

	UNIMC	University of Macerata
	MRU	Mykolas Romeris University
	NBU	New Bulgarian University
	EUV	European University Viadrina
	SWPS	SWPS University
	ULPGC	University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
	UAEGEAN	University of the Aegean
	UP8	University of Paris 8
	ERUA 2	Current EU-funded ERUA Project 2023-2027

WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR?

EDITORIAL	4
IN CASE YOU MISSED IT:	
• Navigating The Edges: The 2025 ERUA Summit	6
• ERUA Winter School and The Summit: Two Perspectives	20
• ERUA Day	23
• The Clean-Up Day: A Reflection Time in the Beach of Bocabarranco	28
SHOWCASING THE ERUA TALENT	31
TRAVELLING SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES	
• Rethinking Politics and Democracy in the Age of AI and Geopolitical Shifts	40
• My Experience at the DAAD EUN Annual Conference in Bonn	44
• Better together: Student Leadership In Building Democratic Participation in European Higher Education	46
SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES	
• Elimu: An International Cooperation Project Centered On Education.	50
• The Chinese Club of the ULPGC	56
• “Kneading is Democracy” or: When Theory Leaves the Lecture Hall	60
• The Blue Manifesto	63
• When Environmental Ambition Meets Reality and Why Europe’s Green Policies Struggle To Be Seen?	72
• At the Edge of Change: Art as a Sustainable Future	76
• RESEARCH: From Populism to Success	79
ERUA EXPERIENCE	
• Journey to ERUA	84
• From ERUA Alumni	86
MEET THE ERUA STUDENT BOARD	89

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third edition of the ERUA magazine.

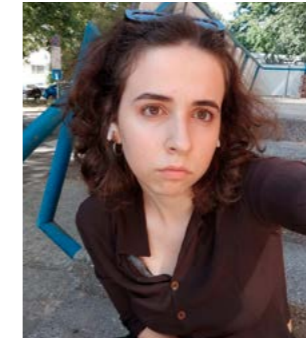
As you read the 3rd edition of Catch-Up, our team would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to the readers and contributors alike. What started as an idea to make this magazine a platform for sharing information and knowledge has evolved into an ever-growing venture of encapsulating student voices, diverse content, and more importantly, capturing the collaborative spirit of ERUA as an alliance. The enthusiasm from ERUA students to write about the things they are passionate about, with factual backing, is what makes this venture unique.

At its core, this platform is always going to be student-centred and student-led. That's why, as an editorial team, we always try to provide maximum flexibility in terms of content creation, so that our contributors have the creative freedom to express themselves. Whether it is reading about a travelling seminar experience, a thought-provoking research article, or the latest updates from the ERUA community, this is an effort towards building an archive that connects its readers and contributors through shared experiences, ideals, and knowledge.

This edition has some really awesome content in store for you. We navigate the edges at Mytilene, Lesvos, where



Daniela Garcia, ULPGC



Diana Venkova, NBU



Muhammad Ismail, EUV



Sofia Tsolova, NBU

the University of the Aegean hosted the 2025 ERUA Annual Summit in parallel to the Winter School. Then we get into the spirit of celebration and bring you coverage of ERUA Day. The cherry on top is that this edition will also feature the artistic prowess of the winners of the first-ever ERUA Art Competition. From the research corner, we have featured ERUA students' informative research works. We are also going to have a chat with Alexandra Petrova (Secretary - ERUA Student Board) to go into the details of the crucial role of the Student Board (SB) within the alliance, and so much more.

We bid farewell to one of our editorial team members, Elena Georgieva (NBU). She was one of the founding members of this platform. We are go-

ing to hear about her ERUA experience in this edition. Team Catch-Up thanks her for her commitment and dedication to ERUA in general and Catch-Up in particular. We wish her the very best in all her endeavours. We are thrilled to have Daniela Garcia (ULPGC) back on our team. Also, we welcome our new Content Manager, Sofia Tsolova (NBU). Finally, as an editorial team, it has been a proud moment for us to receive contributions from all 8 ERUA partners. One of the goals of this platform was to have every ERUA partner represented in terms of content. We never thought that we would achieve this milestone so soon. With that being said, we hope that you have as much fun reading this edition as we had creating it.



NAVIGATING THE EDGES

THE 2025 ERUA SUMMIT

Muhammad Ismail (EUV)

What happens when students are entrusted with shaping and co-creating knowledge? You get a mega student-led event packed with workshops and insightful panel discussions, complemented by fun activities. The 2025 ERUA Summit exactly encapsulates this and more. Hosted by the University of the Aegean, this 5-day extravaganza (from 03/11/2025 to 07/11/2025) was organized in parallel to the ERUA Winter School, “Building ERUA Sustainable Future Learning Paths”. While there were numerous workshops and seminars that took place, we’ll visit some of the highlights from the workshops, panel discussions, and excit-

ing activities led by the collaborative efforts of ERUA students.

PRE-SUMMIT DAY - 03/11/2025

The pre-summit day started off with the much-awaited launch of ERUA-ID. This digital ID is one of many crucial steps towards collaboration and knowledge sharing. The digital ID enables ERUA students and staff members to gain access to digital resources (portals, eLearning platforms, mobility systems) through secure authentication, allowing interoperability between institutional systems and secure

data handling. However, the most awesome feature is its on-site usage, including but not limited to event registration, digital badges, and physical access to facilities such as canteens and workshops. About 100 students became part of the pilot project. After registration, the Winter School participants were treated to an excursion to ERUA’s associated partner, the Lesvos Geopark.

The day also featured two workshops and a research seminar titled “Beyond Humanism”. One of these workshops was about developing ERUA’s Joint Master’s programme on Forced Migration. The other one centered on boosting ERUA’s student engagement, while focusing on visions, challenges, and the way forward. Participants in that workshop consisted of ERUA Student Ambassadors, Student Board members, the Student Engagement Team, and members of the Blue Commission and the Local Boards. Conducted by Niki Kasis (ERUA Student Engagement Team Lead), the workshop involved a presentation by an ERUA student Muhammad Ismail (EUV) on how to involve students as partners, followed by in-depth discussion on key aspects such as students’ perception of higher education as well as making ERUA more inclusive, the role of the Student Engagement Team as identified and perceived by the students, identifying the training necessary to facilitate this vision, and wishes and aspirations towards making ERUA more engaging.

The workshop concluded with participants sharing their aspirations, insights, and feedback by creating seven different posters, thus providing crucial

input to enhance student engagement moving forward.

OPENING CEREMONY, WORKSHOPS, AND MEETINGS- 04/11/2025

The summit kicked off with welcome notes by Prof. Dimitris Papageorgiou (Rector, UAEGEAN), Prof. Elena Theodoropoulou (Scientific Coordinator, ERUA UAEGEAN), Bruna Vives (ERUA Secretary General), and Maxime Cacciutolo Heidel (ERUA Project Coordinator, UP8).

Zuzanna Siwinska (SWPS), Simone De Pace (UNIMC), and Giorgia Pazzi (UNIMC) represented the ERUA Student Board. In her address, Zuzanna highlighted how ERUA has grown from a small group of students at the Summit in Roskilde in October 2023 to around 150 students in Lesvos today. Throughout this period, the establishment of the Student Board, along with various student-led workshops, proves that ERUA is becoming truly student-centred, as she put it: “You are the beating heart of ERUA.”

Simone further explained that the function of the ERUA Student Board is to ensure that students from every ERUA partner university are heard in ERUA’s governance and can actively shape decisions and initiatives. He emphasized its broader impact, such as supporting major alliance activities (like ERUA Day and ambassador selection), guiding the creation of Local Boards, and bridging local and European student communities in close cooperation with the Student Engagement Team.

Giorgia described ERUA Local Boards as the alliance’s “heart and soul”. She ex-

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

plained that these bodies represent student voices locally by electing Student Board representatives and driving engagement through workshops and events. Using Macerata as an example, she highlighted how Local Boards have delivered high-impact initiatives like ERUA Day. She concluded that ERUA's strength “comes from students, and Local Boards” are the clearest expression of that spirit.

During the coffee break, one of the standout attractions that grabbed everyone's attention was the “Roads of Europe - Photographs of a migratory journey” exhibition. This exhibition was the end result of a student-led project selected after the ERUA Open Call for joint projects in December 2024. The project aimed to shed light on the issue of migration through personal testimonies, while also highlighting the work of young amateur photographers. 20 photographs were selected and presented at the first exhibition in the library in Paris, Saint-Denis. The project was a collaborative effort by Martina Tramelli, Nicolas Sklavos, Ludivine Briain, and Elise Lamidey from UP8, and Mel Decorte from NBU.

The UP8 students participated in the project as part of a student association called Focus8. Focus8 is a platform for socially engaged artists that aims to create dialogue around social issues, with a particular focus on migration through art, primarily photography. The association seeks to shift how migration and migrants are perceived, while also questioning how these stories are depicted in mainstream media.

Parallel meetings of eight core ERUA domains (Work Packages/WPs), including Management and Coordination (WP1), Education (WP2), Research (WP3), Shaping the ERUA Campus (WP4), Service to Society (WP5), Innovation (WP6), Student Engagement (WP7), and Dissemination and Impact (WP8), took place afterwards to discuss ongoing projects, current challenges, and the strategic outlook for the future.

Following the lunch break, alongside other events and seminars, multiple student-led workshops were organized. The Speed Networking and Shared Humanity Experience workshop was facilitated by Michalina Lorych (EUV), Gabriela Pawlowicz (EUV), Nicole Marut (EUV), and Clementine Pourbaix (UP8), with Winter School students as its main participants. The workshop aimed to create a safer space for participants to share experiences, explore empowerment through structured discussion, reflect on their own actions and their impact on others, and collectively generate ideas. Participants were paired and guided through a series of questions aligned with the theme, followed by a group reflection and open discussion.

The evening session concluded with a Story Exchange Workshop, organized by a group of students from four different ERUA partner universities. The certified Narrative 4 facilitators included Alexandra Petrova (NBU), Muhammad Ismail (EUV), Saliqa Parveen (EUV), Gabriela Pawlowicz (EUV), Simone De Pace (UNIMC), Sara Pazzi (UNIMC), and Yuliana Shuhani (MRU). The purpose of the Story Exchange Workshop was to build radical em-



Student Representatives Simone De Pace (UNIMC), Zuzanna Siwinska (SWPS) and Giorgia Pazzi (UNIMC) during their official welcome speech

pathy by stepping into another person's shoes. The workshop brought together around 100 participants. Participants were paired and given guiding prompts to exchange personal stories. Afterwards, they formed smaller groups where each participant narrated their partner's story in the first person, as if it had happened to them.

To foster further collaboration, a separate speed networking fair was introduced as an informal space for students to hear what ERUA offers, listen to a few real student experiences, and then answer students' questions. Afterwards, three students shared what these mobilities actually felt like: Bikash Thapa (EUV) talked about attending a summer school in Sofia, Bulgaria, where students from different countries worked as a team on a real case and left with friendships, confidence, and

a “global classroom” feeling; Giorgia Pazzi (UNIMC) described a spring school in Paris that pushed her beyond her own field and showed her that the biggest value is the mix of people, places, and unexpected learning; and Julia Carvalho Bandeira (UP8) explained how a travelling seminar across multiple ERUA cities helped her connect academic interests with real conversations outside the university and eventually motivated her to get more involved in ERUA itself.

The session ended with a quick one-word wrap-up from the students, basically pointing to the same theme: it's not just about degree programs, it's about connections that stick. Later, the night was brightened by the ERUA Vision Karaoke Night. From teachers and students to staff members, everyone had the opportunity

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



to show off their singing skills. A unique element of the Karaoke Night was the focus on native-language songs, adding a strong intercultural touch.

ERUA ACHIEVEMENT, MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS - 05/11/2025

The second day began with a plenary meeting on ERUA's achievements. ERUA Secretary General Bruna Vives and ERUA Project Coordinator (UP8) Maxime Cacciutolo Heidel and representatives from all Work Packages revisited the key milestones of 2025 and discussed their impact on the alliance's future. This was followed by parallel meetings and workshops across different alliance levels and domains.

A particularly important session was the Student Board meeting, co-organized by the Local Board and Winter School students. It gave Student Board members the chance to meet students from all ERUA partner universities in person, introduce themselves, and share ongoing initiatives where students can get involved. The session then moved into an open Q&A, with participants raising questions about how Student Board members communicate with local students, how to organize events at the local level, and how to become more active within the alliance.

The evening session featured several student-led workshops. The second part of Agents of Change, organized by Alexandra Petrova (NBU) and Zofia Różańska (SWPS), focused on the theme of Active Citizens. It included a step-by-step methodology for formulating mission and vision

statements, discussions of practical examples of mission and vision statements from companies and organizations, group work, and the use of thematic cards, after which participants developed customized statements aligned with their values. Additionally, a profile of the "active citizen" and their most important qualities was created through teamwork. The session aimed to empower students as agents of change and leaders in their communities, professional and personal lives.

The workshop concluded with an open, reflective discussion aimed at strengthening mutual understanding. Reflecting on the workshop, Alexandra noted: "It was exciting to see the keywords and aspects of the 'active citizen' emerge from the discussions and take shape. My hope is that every student attending was able to find inspiration and meaning for a personal vision and mission through self-reflection, the shared examples, and joined discussions at the workshop."

Another workshop that was both fun and informative was the "Project Management" session facilitated by Maksymilian Kędzierski (SWPS), Aleksy Andrych (SWPS), and Zuzanna Siwinska (SWPS). It pushed Winter School participants' creative problem-solving skills to the limit. Students were divided into teams based on their birth months, and each team was given a hypothetical scenario and asked to create a character to represent it. Teams then stepped into their characters' shoes to understand their perspective and identify what they would need to do to solve the problem. In the end, each group presented their ideas through storytelling, roleplay,

and other creative formats, showing how their respective protagonists resolved their challenges.

After a long but productive day, students relaxed at Cultural Night, organized by ULPGC students. The evening featured lively music and dance, along with treats and snacks brought by students from their home countries.

INTERVENTIONS, CELEBRATING SUCCESS, AND PANEL DISCUSSION - 06/11/2025

The third day moved from the lively Aegean Campus to the elegant and spacious Mytilene Municipality Theatre. The day featured various speakers and panel discussions. The event was open to the general public. Prof. Dimitris Papageorgiou (Rector, UAEGEAN) started off the proceedings with a warm welcome.

The opening plenary included remarks from Mr. Dimitrios Mpourantonis (General Secretary of Higher Education), Prof. Kostas Moutzouris (North Aegean Regional Governor), Panagiotis Christofas (Mayor of Mytilene), and Dr. Christina Besta (Director General, Hellenic Authority for Higher Education). Mr. Mpourantonis highlighted ERUA as a strong step for European higher education and encouraged deeper cooperation among partner universities. Dr. Besta underlined the role of quality assurance in a changing higher-education landscape and stressed that universities must embrace innovation while safeguarding academic standards.



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

This was followed by interventions from Prof. Arnaud Laimé (Rector, UP8), Dr. Gabi Lombardo (Director of the European Alliance for SSH), and Prof. Armand Marie Leroi (Imperial College). Representing the students, Muhammad Ismail (EUV) emphasized the need to move away from traditional hierarchies in education and toward a partner-based approach. He pointed to concrete examples within ERUA, including the democratic selection of Student Board members through Local Boards and the co-creation of knowledge through a jointly written article by students, teachers, and staff for the ERUA student magazine *Catch-Up*, as well as the student-led workshops organized during the summit.

The afternoon session was all about celebrating ERUA's achievements and unveiling the future road, with Prof. Elena Theodoropoulou moderating the proceedings. Among the main highlights were the handover of the ERUA Board of Rectors chairpersonship from the previous Chairperson, Prof. Inga Žalėnienė (Rector, MRU), to Prof. John McCourt (Rector, UNIMC), followed by Prof. Arnaud Laimé's announcement that the Board of Rectors endorsed the ERUA Legal Entity bylaws, positioning the new legal entity as ERUA's long-term backbone beyond project cycles. The session also featured updates on key initiatives, including the announcement of the ERUA Joint Master's on Forced Migration, the launch of ERUA-iD, and the Social Entrepreneurship Lab (SEL).

Blue Commission Manifesto

When it came to celebrating the milestones, the Blue Commission's handing

over of the ERUA Student Manifesto for Sustainable Higher Education was one for the books. The Blue Commission is a student-led ERUA body of around 20 students from all eight partner universities, created to advocate for sustainability practices across the alliance. Samuel Taviro (Blue Commission member and ULPGC alumnus) took the stage to introduce the initiative and stress that the manifesto is meant to trigger real commitment and action—not “to be left in a drawer.” He described it as a one-page document with 35 measures, intentionally ambitious, focused on improving sustainability in higher education across ERUA (for the manifesto, see p. 63 ff).

On the development of the manifesto, Samuel explained that the idea started at the previous summit. After an open call and a student-led selection process, the Blue Commission worked through eight online workshops and further developed the draft during an in-person Young Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change at ULPGC in May 2025. The draft was then reviewed with input from experts across the partner universities. Samuel concluded by formally presenting the manifesto to the ERUA rectors and leadership, urging them to take it seriously and translate it into concrete measures.

After the manifesto presentation, Dr. Edward Mühle (President, EUV) thanked the students for their strong engagement in ERUA and gave special recognition to the Blue Commission. Speaking on behalf of the rectors and presidents, he called the manifesto an inspiring contribution and said they see it as a solid start-



Maria Victoria Ojeda (ULPGC)



Julia Carvalho Bandeira (UP8)



Samuel Taviro (ULPGC) presenting the Blue Commission's Manifesto for Sustainable Higher Education

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



ing point for dialogue and cooperation, adding that even if there was no time to discuss it in that session, they are open to continuing the conversation with the Blue Commission and the ERUA Green and Inclusive Committee.

He also announced the student-led selection of two new joint bottom-up projects: **ERUAvision and Exploring China**. These projects are a result of a student-led open call for joint projects. The bottom-up projects involve ERUA students teaming up to come up with project ideas aligned with ERUA values and submitting them for approval by the ERUA Student Board (check out the “Meet ERUA Student Board” section for more information). After a very rigorous selection procedure, these projects can receive funding of up to €5,000.

IDeaThon and Hackathon 25 Winners

To continue the celebratory momentum, the iDeaThon winners were presented with awards by Prof. Lluís Serra Majem (Rector, ULPGC). Assistant Prof. Susan Isobel Cranfield McKay and ULPGC Ana Marián, along with fellow students, received the winning award for a project focused on supporting young migrants through education. In her short note, Susan explained that 60 volunteer students taught Spanish, English, and maths to young migrants, especially unaccompanied 16–18-year-olds who often cannot access school, while also supporting younger students with limited language skills. She added that the volunteers created their own learning materials, addressed basic literacy needs, and that 8

out of 20 regular attendees later accessed professional training.

Former ERUA Student Ambassadors Ana Marián also shared a few words. She thanked the team for the opportunity and described the project as a meaningful and “grateful” experience that helped her understand other realities and narratives. She said the main motivation was simple: to make life a little better for the kids. She hoped that they achieved this. She closed by thanking Susan for her work and leadership on the project.

The second prize went to Filomina Zahira Muterino and Alexandra Dan Nikolo from UNIMC for their project on creating innovation labs while working with middle schools. The Rector of UNIMC received the award on their behalf. Prof. Dimitris Pappageorgiou concluded this session by announcing the 2025 Hackathon winners.

Panel Discussions

Innovative Education & Digitalisation

The rest of the day focused on three panel discussions, which included ERUA students, professors, and staff members. The first panel discussion was on Innovative Education & Digitalisation. Prof. Stelios Xanthopoulos moderated this roundtable discussion. He opened by saying that innovation is not only technology, and that technology should support better learning, equity, and efficiency. Representing the students, María Victoria Ojeda (PhD student, ULPGC) stressed the value of alliances for early-career researchers and networking, saying “it’s essential to make it easier to get contacts with academics,” and that ERUA helps PhD students con-

UPCOMING JOINT BOTTOM-UP PROJECTS

ERUAvision

An Eurovision inspired idea to connect ERUA students through music celebrating ERUA values of diversity, democracy, multiculturalism, and multilingualism. The projects involve student from MRU, UNIMC, ULPGC, EUV, and UP8.

**Save the Date:
7th May 2026**

Exploring China

A project aimed for European students to get acquainted with Chinese culture through intercultural exchange and a critical understanding of China’s role in the contemporary world. This project is a collaborative effort of UNIMC, ULPGC, SWPS, MRU, EUV, UAEGEAN and UP8 students.

**Save the Date:
8-9th May 2026**

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

nect, share experiences, and create future collaborations. The discussion then moved to practical examples such as flipped classrooms, intelligent assistants, hackathons/ideathons, and digital tools that can support flexible and greener mobility, alongside ERUA-iD as a way to build trust and enable smoother access across universities. Speakers generally emphasized that AI must remain human-centred and ethical, and that ERUA needs clear guidelines and a shared framework soon because AI is already being used by students and staff. The panel closed with a simple takeaway: innovation is mainly about people and mindset, not only the tools.

Alliance for Skills, Competitiveness & Democracy

The second panel, “Democracy, Social Change & Local Communities”, moderated by Alicja Kotlowska (Vice Rector’s Representative for International Projects, SWPS), linked democracy with open dialogue and long-term consensus building inside ERUA. The discussion brought together UNHCR representatives, academics, and students to talk through migration, terminology and narratives, polarization and disinformation, and what universities can realistically change. The student representation included Julia Carvalho Bandeira (UP8, Student Board and Steering Committee member) and Aike Myrzaibramova (ERUA Ambassador, Chairperson of ERUA Viadrina Local Board).

In response to the question about teaching methodology, Julia said that teaching migration and democracy should not stay only in lectures and theory. She

argued that it is important to “leave the classroom,” connect the theoretical framework with real action, and build empathy because universities are educating the citizens of the future. She added that this approach also helps bridge the gap between universities and local communities and can lead to social change, even if that is the most we can realistically aim for.

Building on that, Aike gave a concrete example from the Winter School field trip. She said the visit was especially insightful for students who do not study migration or Social Sciences and Humanities, and that seeing the camps in real life, along with the photos and stories shared, made the topic emotional and real. For her, this is exactly what creates empathy, because field trips help students face realities that they usually have the privilege to ignore. She also mentioned the story of the three grandmothers from Lesvos holding a refugee baby. She said she googled it right after the trip and learned they were even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, which is something she and many others would probably never have known without that field visit.

In response to the question of how students manage polarization and disinformation in their digital lives, and whether media/AI literacy should be part of the university curriculum or is something they already know how to deal with, Aike focused on the new risks of generative AI and deepfakes and argued that the solution starts with education, saying “the very fundamental part of the solution for this problem is demystifying AI... and that is done through education.” Julia, meanwhile, stressed the need for clear rules



Natali Todorova (Student Ambassador NBU) contributing to the panel

around new tech, saying “we must also talk about regulation... we must have some sort of guidelines on how to try to profit from it.” The panel closed by highlighting major challenges ahead, from AI and information literacy to human rights, civic resilience, and the role of universities in shaping critical thinking and democratic culture.

Engaged, Empowered, Impactful: Student Participation in re-shaping Higher Education

The final discussion of the evening, “Engaged, Empowered, Impactful: Student Participation in re-shaping Higher Education,” brought together a mixed group of speakers representing student leadership, alliance coordination, and external European university alliances. The panel included ERUA student representatives, Alexan-

dra Petrova (NBU) from the Student Board and Samuel Taviro (ULPGC) from Student Board and Blue Commission, ERUA student engagement lead (Niki Kasis, EUV), and invited contributors from other alliances and networks working on participation and impact in higher education (Audrey Sullivan from Circle U./FOREU4ALL, and Katerina Schoina and Bartolomeo Sangermano, former Student Representatives from CIVIS and UNITA).

Defining engagement, Alexandra framed it as involvement and belonging, saying student engagement cannot work “if a student doesn’t feel part of something meaningful,” with emphasis that “universities are mainly for the students.” Samuel pointed out that there are two roles in ERUA: students who stay engaged through Local Boards and activities, and students

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

who formally represent other students through the Student Board. The challenge is linking these two groups properly, because most students are only around for a short time, and it's easy to overload the few who step up.

The discussion concluded on the premise that student engagement only works when students actually feel involved, not just "represented" on paper. Everyone circled back to the same challenge: student representatives can't carry the whole system, and engaged students will not step up if the process is messy, time-consuming, and unrealistic for a 3-to-4-year student timeline. The takeaway was that if European University Alliances want real participation, they have to make participation manageable. This means establishing clear roles, reducing bureaucracy, better coordination and training, and proper recognition of the workload, as students are not staff members; they are students first. Otherwise, it will always lead to burn-out and "student engagement" remains a slogan.

After another productive day, the summit participants enjoyed the Official Summit Dinner at the 'Mythical Coast' Hotel. The night featured lively music and exquisite food.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND TREE PLANTATION - 07/11/2025

We now move towards the final day of the summit at the Mytilene Chamber of Commerce. The day had two rounds of thought-provoking panel discussions.

Universities & Sustainable Communities

The panel brought together a mix of academic leads and sustainability practitioners from UAEGEAN and MRU, alongside student representation and external expertise. Participants included faculty working on sustainability-focused curriculum and teaching, university leadership voices from cultural and communication studies, researchers linking SDGs to regional development, and a Vangelis Zaftis, PhD Student (UAegean) representing the ERUA Blue Commission.

The panel's main point was that sustainability only becomes real when universities treat it as daily practice, not a separate topic. This means linking teaching to local reality, using a mix of physical and digital formats while measuring both students' learning and community impact. Scaling up should focus on adaptation and sharing, not copy-paste.

Zaftis made the student-side expectation very clear: "We need to move from just the participation of the students to a co-leadership methodology," where students help design and co-author sustainability policies with university green committees. He also advocated for practical enablers, including "some funds" for student projects, mentorship links to staff, and the need to make the Blue Commission a more permanent structure so projects do not "die" after one semester.

Arts, Edges & Communities

The panel brought together university leadership, academic leads, and cultural policy voices, alongside student repre-

sentation and research expertise from across the alliance. The panel's main point was that "edges" are not borders or dead ends; they are living thresholds where disciplines and communities can actually meet. Arts was framed as a way of doing research and public engagement, not as decoration. The Biennale was presented as a practical platform for experimentation that connects the university to local life through projects, workshops, and collaborations, especially from islands and other peripheral contexts where the alliance is rooted.

Expanding further on that, panellist Natali Todorova (ERUA Student Ambassador, NBU) pointed out that edges are not endings; they are thresholds where new connections become possible. She

stressed that art is not a luxury but a necessity, because it helps people imagine inclusive futures and build bridges across disciplines, languages, and lived realities. Her point was also about how student-led art and culture initiatives can activate community spaces, shift perspectives, and make knowledge travel beyond academia into real local contexts.

With that, the ERUA Summit 2025 came to its conclusion. The summit exemplified the role of intercultural collaboration in co-creating and democratizing knowledge, with students at the forefront. After the summit, Winter School students and summit participants travelled to the outskirts of Mytilene for a tree plantation in collaboration with the Holy Metropolis and the Forestry Department of Mytilene.



Participants of the ERUA Winter School during a story exchange workshop



A PERSPECTIVE

ERUA WINTER SCHOOL AND THE SUMMIT

Sofia Tsoлова (NBU)

As mentioned before, the ERUA Winter School, “Building ERUA Sustainable Future Learning Paths,” was organized in parallel to the Summit. Our team member Sofia Tsoлова (ERUA Student Ambassador & Student Board member) interviewed Winter School participant and ERUA Student Ambassador Valentine Loubet (UP8), regarding his experience.

Sofia Tsoлова (ST): To start, can you introduce yourself—how old are you, and how long have you been involved in ERUA?

Valentin Loubet (VL): I’m 22 years old. I became an (ERUA) ambassador for my university, Paris 8, this summer. I joined my Local Board in May/June this year, so it’s really just the beginning for me.

ST: During the week, did you take part in more Summit activities or more Winter School sessions?

VL: Definitely more Winter School activities—especially the ones focused on psychology and climate change.

ST: Did you learn anything new about another culture or language—something that stayed with you?

VL: Yes, it was interesting to notice cultural differences, especially between universities—like different methods of teaching.

ST: What was your favourite workshop?

VL: The workshop on Monday, in the seminar about psychology. We worked in six teams and had to analyze things from different points of view. That was great.

ST: Was there a moment that really stuck with you—something you think you’ll still remember a year from now?

VL: This kind of opportunity isn’t frequent. We were with such a diverse group of people. I study European Studies, but there were people studying languages, medicine, and more. It was so diverse and so interesting. A lot happened this week—honestly, every day felt like a new adventure.

ST: And what was the funniest moment for you—something silly, or just a moment that made you laugh?

VL: Probably the karaoke. It was so cool—like, a French song comes on and everyone dances to it. Then the same happens for a Bulgarian song, a Spanish one... The karaoke was a really great night, and I hope to have more experiences like that.

ST: If you had to summarize the whole week in one word, what would it be?

VL: “Sharing.” There was so much action and so many good meetings—so yes, “sharing.”

ST: That’s a beautiful word—and very much in the spirit of ERUA.

Katerina Taka (ERUA Communication Officer at the UAEGEAN) shared her experience of the Summit in a candid chat with Sofia.

ST: What was the funniest thing you did during the Summit?

Katerina Taka: We had quite a few funny moments during this Summit! From trying to coordinate the interviews while straightening the ERUA flag, and almost touching the ground to avoid photobombing the video, to figuring out why the confetti poppers weren’t popping during the group photo while a full amphitheater of 200 people waiting for the shot, we can definitely look back and laugh about it now!

ST: Have you learned something about another culture or language? What?

KT: Yes, quite a lot actually. Even though many participants were focused on Greek culture, I realized how many qualities we all share, especially during the social events. In the end, we all sang and danced in the same way!

ST: What was your favourite workshop?

KT: The “ERUA Achievements” session. It felt like the first time we truly celebrated together as ERUA students, researchers, and administrative and teaching staff. It brought together everything we’d been working on. It was a meaningful moment for all the work packages to see the fruits of our efforts, and a seed of hope for the ones ahead.

ST: What’s one thing you didn’t enjoy?

KT: Honestly, the lack of time. There were so many interesting sessions and so many people to talk to that I couldn’t at-

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



tend everything I wanted. The days went by far too quickly.

ST: If you could summarize the experience in one word?

KT: Inspiring.

ST: How many new people do you think you met?

KT: Over 100. Between the workshops, the photoshoots, and the social events, it was incredibly rewarding to finally meet people who have been working toward the same goals as us, across different work packages.

ST: Will you go to the next ERUA Summit?

KT: Definitely. These gatherings are not just about meetings, they're about connections and growth within our community. I wouldn't miss it, and I'm already looking forward to the next ERUA Summit in Sofia!

ST: How would you describe the Summit preparations?

KT: The preparations were quite demanding. As Communication Officer, I had to make sure all the visual and printed ma-

terials were ready on time, and that both internal and external communication flow smoothly, coordination with local stakeholders and the press to keep all ERUA programs aligned. A big challenge, but also a very meaningful choice by UAEGEAN, was opening the Summit to the public and to the local community. We wanted to give our ERUA members the chance to showcase their work outside the Alliance, and that added an extra layer of responsibility.

What I really felt throughout the process was honouring the weight of hosting such a large event. People travelled from seven different countries, with different backgrounds, research fields, and expectations. You realize you're not just organizing sessions, you're shaping people's experiences and managing their time. You want to respect the effort they made to be here, and that pushes you to give your absolute best. And I couldn't have done that without the ERUA Communication Team. They went above and beyond to support the UAEGEAN team before and throughout the event, and that really reflects the spirit we're building within the Alliance.



Muhammad Ismail (EUV)

12th of December was one for the Books for ERUA as ERUA Day was celebrated across all partner universities. Each ERUA partner brought its unique blend to the celebrations. We are now going to take a stroll through each ERUA partner across eight different countries and see how they celebrated ERUA Day.

University of Macerata



At UNIMC, ERUA Day had informal and relaxed celebratory vibes. **Giorgia Pazzi** (Local Board Member, UNIMC) described

it best in her own words: "What I liked the most about this year's ERUA Day at the University of Macerata was the fact that it was entirely dedicated and thought of directly for the students. The activities

our Local Board organised were very informal, fun, and engaging. Indeed, the majority of our ERUA Day was dedicated to board games, props designing and an ERUA themed photo booth. All activities through which students could have fun, get to know each other and the Alliance, and relax together in a cozy environment. From my point of view, the games, as well as the final aperitif and karaoke, were the true core and heart of our ERUA Day, and I was pretty proud of the ERUA themed Goose Game that I myself designed, that got the players to give a closer look to our Alliance in such a fun and engaging way."

Mykolas Romeris University



At MRU, the day was less about formalities and more about students taking real ownership of the space.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Yuliana Shuhani (Institutional Coordinator for Student Engagement, MRU) reflected: “On 12 December 2025, Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) turned ERUA Day into more than a formal celebration. For me, it was a confirmation that meaningful student engagement grows when students are trusted and given space. Throughout the day, I saw students step in not because they were asked to, but because they felt invited to share ideas, lead activities, and connect in their own way.”

She highlighted “Speed Friending: Intercultural Exchange,” describing how it “turned the classroom into a lively meeting space” and how it became “a lived experience of ERUA values openness, diversity, and community shaped directly by students themselves.” She also pointed out that the award ceremony was a key moment because it recognized the people building the community while still keeping students at the centre. She summed up the vibe perfectly: “ERUA stopped feeling like a structure and started feeling like a shared space. It felt less like the end of an event and more like the beginning of something that can grow over time, where engagement slowly turns into belonging, and belonging into responsibility.”

Université Paris 8

In Paris 8, ERUA Day was planned around one simple reality: students were deep in exam season. **Julia Carvalho Bandeira** (Student Engagement Assistant, Student Board Representative, UP8) ex-



plained how the Local Board and local administration responded by creating something practical and genuinely student-friendly. ERUA Day “was from the beginning to the end, centered around the students.” Because exams were happening that week and right after, the team created “a space dedicated for the students to have a break, eat a little snack, drink a warm beverage, and maybe even participate in an ERUA quiz.” The outcome, as she put it, “was really interesting,” because it gave students a moment to breathe during the most stressful time of the semester while still staying connected to ERUA. She closed by crediting the people who made it happen: “Thanks to the Local Board and the local Team who came through and made this day possible.”

New Bulgarian University



Over at NBU, the day ended on a high note with music. **Sofia Tsoleva** (ERUA Ambassador, ERUA Student Board Representative, NBU) shared that “the main event on the 12.12 ERUA Day was the rock concert,” describing it as “the grand finale of the day,” with the Local Board present and the concert broadcast to other ERUA universities. Her point wasn’t just about

entertainment, it was about what shared moments do to a community: “I believe collective listening to music is about sharing emotions, sharing an atmosphere with other people and relishing being yourself in an environment that feels safe and fun at the same time.” She linked that directly back to the alliance, saying concerts bring people together around a shared interest, and “that is ERUA’s mission as well.” Even across distance, she captured the energy of the day in one line: “Even over kilometres of space we can be One.”

University of the Aegean



At UAEGEAN, ERUA Day felt like a snapshot of everything the alliance has been building across the year. **Katerina Taka** (ERUA Communication Officer, UAEGEAN) summed it up like this: “The ERUA Day 2025 at UAEGEAN brought together everything we’ve been building throughout the year: from STEM, entrepreneurship, digitalisation to Arts and Edges.” What made it stand out, she said, was seeing students not only participate but reflect on the year’s progress: “Seeing students actively engage with and reflect on our 2025 milestones made the spirit of the alliance feel tangible and deeply rewarding, as we could all see its measurable impact.” Her takeaway was the bigger meaning behind the celebration: “It reminded us that ERUA is about shared societal

impact and a strong sense of belonging within our community.”

SWPS



ERUA Day turned out to be a collaborative opportunity with SWPS’s local student clubs and organizations. The international vibes of ERUA Day were combined with the Day of Student Research Clubs and Student Organizations, creating a vibrant space full of ideas, passions, and student-led initiatives. ERUA gave an international context to local engagement, showing students that their passions and projects can grow beyond one university and be developed together with peers from across Europe. **Zofia Różańska** (SWPS Substitute Student Board Member, Blue Commission member) summarized this experience best: “The event attracted great interest from students and created an excellent opportunity for conversation, networking, and the exchange of experiences.”

European University Viadrina



For **Aike Myrzaibraimova** (ERUA Ambassador and Chairperson, ERUA Viadrina Local Board), ERUA Day was about looking

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Students writing down ideas at EUV

at the future and virtually enjoying the celebration across the ERUA partners. Her “Wish Box” idea really engaged Viadrina students: “At Viadrina we celebrated ‘ERUA Day’ 11.12.2025 and 12.12.2025 . On 11.12.2025, I proposed an idea of a Wish Box, where students and staff are asked for any event ideas they would like to see at the university that can be accomplished by the ERUA Local Board, in exchange for some items of merchandise. Surprisingly, it was more popular amongst the students than I expected, and we gathered more than 10 event ideas, which, with the 33-person attendance, is a very high number of participation. In general, the celebrations went very wholesome, and it was nice to see so many people from partner universities online.”

The day also featured the Shared Humanity Experience (SHE) workshop that took place in FForst (a student-led cultural space and ERUA’s associated partner).

University of Las Palmas Gran Canaria



Manuel Perera Dorta (ERUA ULPGC Local Board Member) described ERUA Day as a fast paced and riveting experience.

Thanks to the ULPGC’s team, this turned out to be memorable for him: “ERUA Day was a great but short experience, because when you are having fun time flies. I would like to highlight the gentleness of the team that gave us a fencing workshop. They were really committed on helping us and explaining everything necessary and more. Through fun and their experience, they provided us with an incredible time about a sport barely practiced on the Canary Islands.”



Fencing workshop at ULPGC



Student-designed ERUA game at UNIMC



THE CLEAN-UP DAY

A REFLECTION TIME IN THE BEACH OF BOCABARRANCO

Izan Suárez Nuez (ULPGC)

As an European Alliance, ERUA has, from the very beginning, been notably engaged with sustainability and with making a real positive impact. Examples include the Young Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change and the manifesto written by the members of the ERUA Blue Commission to implement different adjustments across universities to make them more environmentally efficient. Following this engagement, last October 13th, all the ERUA universities were called to action and participated together in a very symbolic activity framed within World Cleanup Day. This joint initiative was promoted by students from the Blue Commission and representatives of

the Green and Inclusive Committee (GiC), the official body in the alliance in charge of the sustainability field. It consisted of preparing cleanups at each of our universities and, in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, we decided to do it in a quite meaningful place for us: the beach of Bocabarranco.

Since we are surrounded by the ocean, water and sand are part of our culture and identity. It is almost a poetic thing to say aloud, but our identity and pride is our beautiful Canary Islands. Despite our pride and feeling of belonging, it seems that we are not truly aware of the harm that us as human beings do flagrantly to nature every day. The Cleanup Day was definitely an opportunity to reflect: what

we saw was (to say the least) a deteriorated image of our island.

The beach of Bocabarranco and its surroundings are frequently visited by several associations and ordinary citizens in order to take away the largest amount of trash possible, since it is disturbingly dirty. By the same token, Bocabarranco is located in a commercial area (next to shopping centres). It is a very windy beach with strong waves, which causes the ocean to bring back our trash to the coast. You could see waste in every corner, from cigarette butts, old fishing lines, and broken pieces of pallets, to glass bottles and millions of microplastics.

On this occasion, we were lucky, and we had the collaboration of real nature lovers: some of the volunteers who work in the association SoyMamut, which is also part of the project ECOLABORA. This type of interaction with local associations should be promoted within the alliance, as it involves essential ERUA values and paves the way for real social impact. Thanks to the kind volunteers, we were able to use innovative tools created by the association to clean the sand and remove as many microplastics as we could. The tools have different forms, which one could use depending on the area that is worked upon, and they were very helpful in our duties.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight how alarming the situation that we encountered is, especially the unbelievable amount of plastic sticks that are used as cotton buds. We wondered why we found them on a beach, under the rocks, near the coast, and the answer was giv-



Clean-Up Day in action

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

en very quickly: people flush cotton buds down the toilet. These products end up in the ocean, then inside sea animals, and later on our coasts. This is the image of a cruel world that shows the relevance of European laws such as the EU restrictions on certain single-use plastics, published on July 3rd 2021. Nonetheless, students are also taking steps forward to ameliorate our current situation, as illustrated by the formidable work of the Blue Commission, who have recently written a manifesto on how to make our campus lives more sustainable. Bodies such as the Blue Commission help students connect with our planet and make small changes in our lives.

To sum up, this article is a call to action. Sea pollution is horrifying and a crime

against nature. This does not have to do only with the seas or single-use plastics, but with our power to choose: what we do, how conscious we are about the harm already done to the planet, and whether we raise awareness about it or not. That is the simplest and yet most effective tool that we have as individuals to contribute. Apart from this, we shall also promote more laws that protect our ecosystems in order to control the pollution caused by human actions, such as ship oil spilling and the flagrant garbage dumping performed on land and at sea. It is not enough to speak up and be politically correct. Indeed, that is the easier path, but if we truly want change to take place, we have to act.

And the question is: are we ready to fight for our planet?



ERUA Blue Commission Members, representatives of the Green Inclusive Committee (GiC), and Volunteers (SoyMamut) at Clean-Up Day.

ERUA CREATIVE EXPRESSION CONTEST



Nicole Marut (EUV)
and Clementine Pourbaix (UP8)



SHOWCASING THE ERUA TALENT

As part of the ERUA Day celebrations on 12th of December 2025, the winners of the first edition of the ERUA Creative Expression Contest were officially announced. This contest was organized by the ERUA Student Board and invited students across across the alliance to creatively engage with ERUA's core values by submitting original work in one of four categories: poetry, photography, short video (reel), and drawing/illustration. The initiative aimed to encourage artistic expression as a way to reflect on key themes such as inclusiveness and diversity, multilingualism and cultural exchange, democratic values, creativity, and European cooperation.

By offering an open and accessible creative space, the contest allowed participants to translate academic values into personal, cultural, and artistic narratives, highlighting the important role of creativity within European Higher Education. The call for submissions resulted in 36 artworks, demonstrating strong engagement and a wide variety of artistic approaches. The contributions reflected both individual experiences and broader reflections on unity in diversity, intercultural dialogue, academic freedom, and social responsibility, showcasing the richness of perspectives within the ERUA community.

Behind the Scenes of the Contest

The contest idea was proposed by Nicole Marut, representative on the Student Board of European University Viadri-

na, who was inspired by the Student Board's internal working group ERUA Day. She developed the initial concept and framework, including the contest criteria and categories. Originally envisioned as a poetry competition, the project quickly evolved into a multi-category contest to better reflect the diversity of creative expression among ERUA students. The contest was promoted across ERUA platforms, including social media. Clémentine Pourbaix, student representative from Paris 8, contributed to the visual communication by creating designs for Instagram posts and posters. The contest was open to all students from universities within the ERUA Alliance, who submitted their work via a Google Form. In total, 36 artworks were officially submitted across all categories from all partner universities.

Jury and Selection Process

To ensure fair and diverse evaluation, members of the Student Board, representing all eight ERUA universities, were asked to nominate jury members from among students, professors, and university staff. The final jury consisted of 15 members, with all eight universities represented. Bikash Thapa, member of the Local Board and Event Manager at European University Viadrina, developed the evaluation criteria and coordinated communication with the jury. The artworks were assessed based on:

- Relevance to ERUA values
- Originality and creativity
- Emotional and artistic impact
- Technical quality and form

Each artwork was scored from 1 to 5 in each category. The final results were determined by averaging the scores, leading to the selection of the contest winners. Let us immerse ourselves in the artistic works of each winner.

POETRY



1. Lydia Dimitreli UAEGEAN

We Speak in Light

We were born from different dawns
Aegean winds, Paris songs,
Sofia's dreams and northern snow,
voices rising, όλοι μαζί, to grow.

We speak in sparks, in crossing lines,
in borrowed words and
shared designs.
Our voices blend, a woven thread,
from every thought our hearts
have said.

Καλημέρα, you say, and time begins
the sun replies beneath our skins.
Each accent drips with
something true,
each word a seed that breaks in two
half mine, half you.

We are not one note, but symphony,
a πολυφωνία of empathy.
We question stars, rewrite the norm,
curiosity our quiet storm.

From Las Palmas fire to Baltic cold,
we trade our fears, we turn them gold.
From Frankfurt thoughts to
Rome's embrace,
we learn that difference has a face.

Δημοκρατία, freedom's flame,
no border strong enough to tame.
We dream, we dare, we disagree,
and still, we move in unity.

Because Europe is not stone
and steel
it's breath, it's hands, it's how we feel.
It's every "why" we ever spoke,
each silent vow we never broke.

And when the night returns to stay,
we'll whisper softly, come what may
"Μείνε." "Ελπίδα." "Μαζί."
Not just words a way to be.
We are the light that will not leave.



2. Annisa Putri Zauhara

UNIMC

 **Circular Bridges**

In my country of islands,
I have watched rivers carry dreams
and debris together,
each wave whispering, “tolong
selamatkan aku” –
please, save me –
as mountains of discarded things
grow higher than our hopes.
What we lose becomes heavier
each dawn.

Across the sea, in the warmth of Italia,
broken things are welcomed home –
ben tornato, they say –
as waste rises again as light,
as energy,
as possibility.

Between us, a fragile bridge begins
to form,
not of steel or treaties,
but of courage, listening,
and the desire to reshape
tomorrow with
gentler hands.

In Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang,
I see people who refuse to surrender

to the flood of waste –
artists, youths, mothers, scavengers –
transforming loss into beauty.
Re:GRENATE becomes a heartbeat,
teaching us that forgotten things
still carry a pulse.

Dialogue becomes devotion:
WtE sparks become hope;
EPR laws become protection;
student exchanges become prayers
whispered across continents.
Solidarité, cooperazione,
gotong royong –
each word a promise not to give up on
our shared earth.

Here, nothing is truly waste.
Not the objects.

Not the people.
Not the dreams.

Circularity becomes our way of saying
we believe in second chances –
for materials,
for nations,
for ourselves.



3. Kyriakos Nektarios Sfakianoudis

UAEGEAN

Where Knowledge Learns to Breathe

Where knowledge learns to breathe,
we rise,
Under wide, ungoverned skies.
Ideas spark like stars at night
Freedom turning thought to light.

Waves of wonder, bold and free,
Push the mind toward what might be.
Innovation’s restless roar
Calling us to shape once more.

Where boundaries blur
and lines unfold,
Disciplines weave threads of gold.
A dancer steps into a lab,
A scholar maps the world in sand,
A coder hears the poet’s rhyme,
And physics bends to borrowed time.

Here, many voices join the call
No one too quiet, none too small.
Democracy in every word,
Every heartbeat seen and heard.
A circle wide, a table long,
Where difference makes the whole
grow strong.

And research, like a river flows
Back to the lives from which it rose.
Questions whispered in the street,
Problems carried in our feet.
All return to shape our view,
All return to make us new.

So let us walk this open shore,
Where learning breathes forevermore.
Where courage grows, where
minds expand,
Where we create with heart and hand.
Together we lift tomorrow’s flame
Different voices, shared acclaim.

In this alliance bold and wide,
We move like tides that never hide,
Rising, shifting, full of grace,
Transforming every time and place.

For knowledge lives when we unite
A dawn becoming its own light.

DRAWING

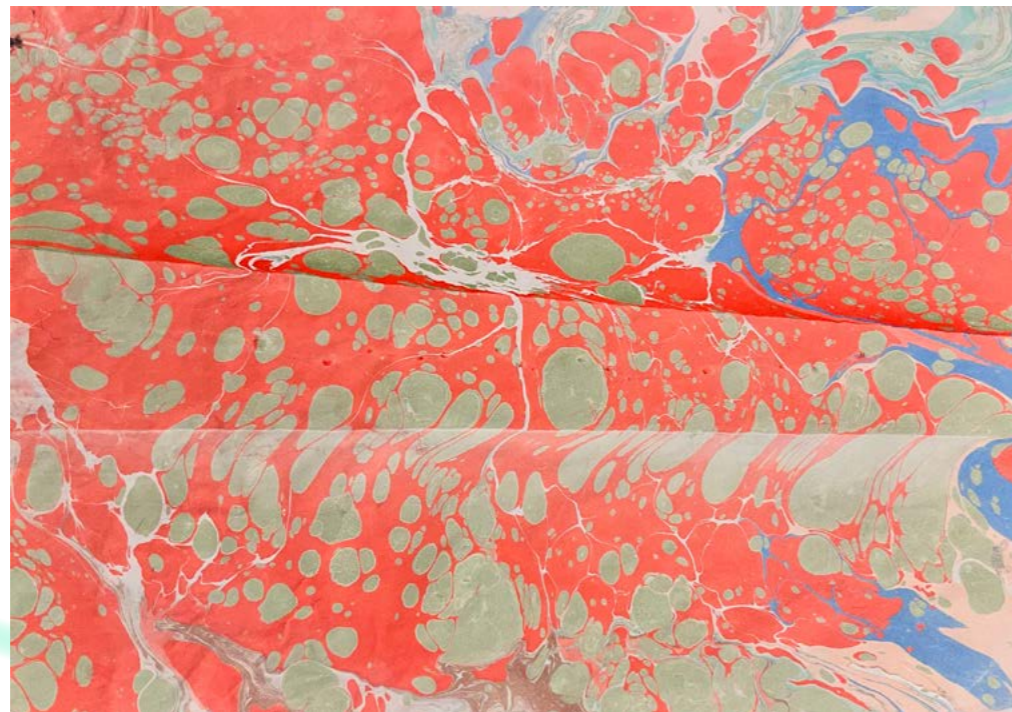


1. Daniella Kyrylovets
EUV

“Where Cultures Meet”



2. Annalisa Monaldi
UNIMC



“THE SPACE IN BETWEEN”



“A Multilingual Experience”

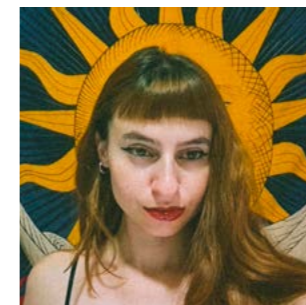


3. Monika Godzik
EUV

VIDEO



“Endless blue of the Aegean stretching beyond the horizon”



1. Maria Samprakou
UAEGEAN



“What does ERUA mean?”



2. Atif Yasen
MRU

Click each video title to see

PHOTOGRAPHY



1. Erik Semashkin
UP8

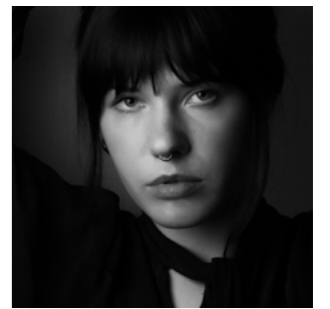
“The diversity and cultural richness that each student brings”



2. Krzysztof Kozak
SWPS



“HAVE YOU EVER ARRIVED ANYWHERE?”



3. Julia Żamejć
SWPS

“Tatra Tales”

RETHINKING POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF AI AND GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS

Matteo Musto (UNIMC)

Students gathering at the entrance of MRU in Vilnius

Participating in the ERUA travelling seminar “Rethinking Politics and Democracy in the Age of AI and Geopolitical Shifts” represented a highly formative experience, both academically and personally. The seminar was organized within the framework of European Reform University Alliance, of which the University of Macerata, my home institution, is an active member. Thanks to this initiative, I had the opportunity to engage in an international learning environment that combined theoretical reflection, empirical analysis, and intercultural exchange, all centered on some of the most pressing political challenges of our time.

The structure of the travelling seminar was particularly effective in fostering dialogue and continuity. It was divided into two phases: the first took place in September in Macerata, when Lithuanian students and professors visited our university, and the second in October in Vilnius, hosted by Mykolo Romeris University (MRU). During the week in Macerata, we attended a series of lectures and roundtables that introduced the core themes of the seminar, including the transformation of democratic systems, the role of artificial intelligence in politics, and the impact of geopolitical shifts on European governance. These activities allowed students from different academic traditions to begin working together, creating a shared space for discussion and mutual learning.

The week in Vilnius represented the culmination of the travelling seminar and offered an even deeper level of engagement. Being physically present in Lithuania added an essential contextual dimen-

sion to the topics discussed. The seminar was led by Professors Algis Krupavičius and Simona Epasto, whose academic expertise and pedagogical approach were fundamental to the success of the experience. Their lectures combined political theory, comparative analysis, and contemporary case studies, encouraging us to critically assess how democracy is evolving under the pressure of technological innovation and global political instability.

One of the most significant strengths of the seminar was the contribution of numerous guest speakers, including distinguished scholars and political figures. Among them, the presence of a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Lithuania, and later of independent Lithuania, was particularly meaningful. His testimony offered a rare and powerful perspective on political transformation, sovereignty, and the challenges of democratic transition. Hearing firsthand accounts of Lithuania’s passage from Soviet rule to independence made the discussions on democracy, institutional reform, and geopolitical vulnerability much more tangible and emotionally engaging.

The central theme of the seminar, rethinking politics and democracy in the age of artificial intelligence and geopolitical shifts, was addressed from multiple angles. We explored how AI is increasingly influencing political communication, electoral processes, public administration, and policy-making, raising crucial questions about transparency, accountability, and democratic control. At the same time, we reflected on broader geo-

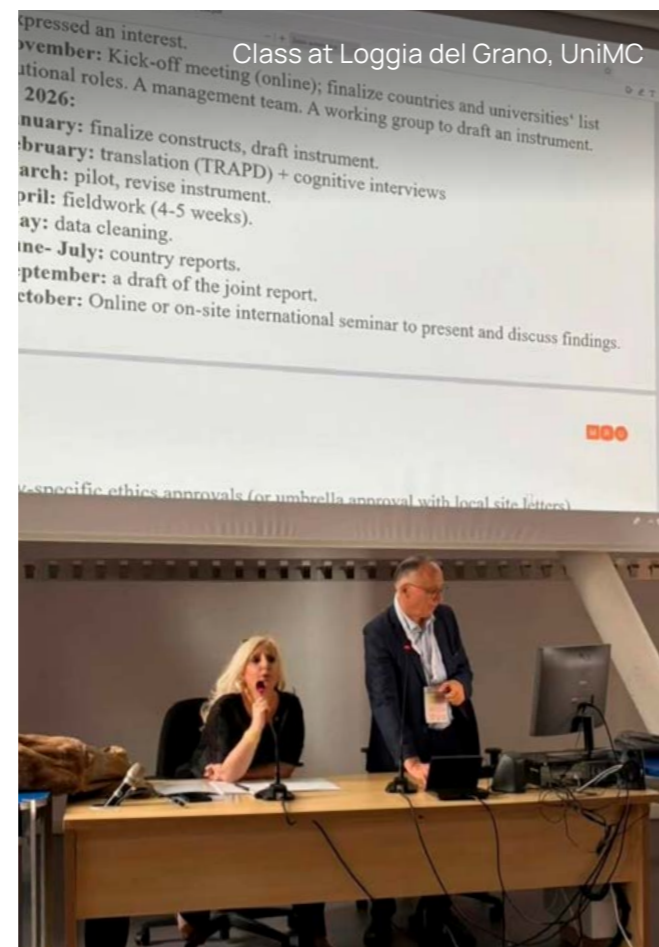
TRAVELLING SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

political dynamics, such as the reconfiguration of power relations in Europe, security concerns in Eastern and Baltic regions, and the implications of global instability for democratic resilience. Discussing these issues in Lithuania, a country that has experienced occupation, political repression, and later democratic rebirth, added a profound historical and geopolitical depth to our reflections.

What made this experience particularly enriching was the continuous interaction with students from different cultural, national, and academic backgrounds. The exchange of perspectives allowed me to better understand how historical memory, political culture, and national experiences shape different interpretations of democracy and political participation. Comparing viewpoints with Lithuanian and other international students challenged some of my assumptions and helped me develop a more nuanced and critical approach to political analysis. This intercultural dimension was not only intellectually stimulating but also essential in fostering a truly European academic experience.

Beyond the academic program, living and studying in Vilnius for a week contributed significantly to my personal growth. The city itself, with its visible layers of history and its strategic geopolitical position, served as an extension of the seminar's themes. Observing how Lithuania positions itself within the European Union and in relation to current international tensions helped me connect theoretical discussions with real-world political choices and societal attitudes.

In conclusion, the ERUA travelling seminar at Mykolo Romeris University was an exceptionally valuable experience that combined academic rigor, historical awareness, and intercultural dialogue. It strengthened my interest in political science and democratic theory, enhanced my ability to engage critically with complex global issues, and highlighted the importance of listening to diverse and authoritative voices. Most importantly, it demonstrated how international academic cooperation can contribute to a deeper and more informed understanding of politics and democracy, especially in a geopolitical context as complex and significant as that of Lithuania.



MY EXPERIENCE AT THE DAAD EUN ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN BONN



Gabriela Pawlowicz (EUV)

Student Representatives from German Alliance member universities gathering at the conference in Bonn

In December 2025, I had the opportunity to participate in the EUN Annual Conference, organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Organized in Bonn, the conference brought together representatives of universities across Germany that are members of various European University Alliances. I attended the event as a student representative of the European University Viadrina and as an active member of the ERUA Student Board and the local ERUA structure at our university.

For me, this conference was far more than a formal meeting; it was a very enriching experience and a unique opportunity for exchange. Over two intensive days, we engaged in peer-learning formats and open discussions focused on the future of European University Alliances, with a strong emphasis on student participation. It was inspiring to see how many students and staff members across Europe are deeply committed to shaping these alliances in a meaningful and sustainable way.

One of the central themes of the conference was student involvement in the governance and development of European alliances. Together with other student representatives, I shared experiences, challenges, and solutions related to ensuring that student voices are genuinely heard. Many of us face similar challenges across alliances such as limited visibility, communication barriers, and the challenge of translating ambitious

goals into tangible actions at the local level. Exchanging perspectives on these shared problems made it clear that cooperation and mutual learning are essential for progress.

At the same time, the conference offered me the chance to present good practices already implemented at our university. One example was the Viadrina Info Channel, a platform that provides information in English about what is happening at the university, both within the ERUA alliance and at the local level. This example showed that even relatively simple solutions can significantly improve communication and inclusiveness within an alliance.

Beyond the formal programme, what made this experience truly special was the people. I met many dedicated, open-minded, and motivated individuals who share the same commitment to European cooperation and student engagement as I do.

Overall, my participation in the DAAD EUN Annual Conference in Bonn was an extremely positive and empowering experience. I returned with new knowledge, fresh ideas, and renewed motivation to continue working for strong student representation within ERUA and beyond. Events like this demonstrate the real potential of European University Alliances: not only as institutional frameworks, but as living communities shaped by engaged students and committed individuals across Europe.

BETTER TOGETHER

STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN BUILDING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION



Zuzanna Siwinska (SWPS)
and Niki Kasis (EUV)

Some participants of the un-conference

Student participation needs to be sustainable because alliances only work when student involvement lasts over time, builds experience and survives leadership changes instead of restarting every year. It also - obviously- needs to be democratic because students must be rightfully represented, heard and able to influence decisions in a fair and accountable way. Without sustainability, participation fades; without democracy it loses legitimacy. We ought to avoid both.

- Giulia Rebecca Conte, Student Representative from the CIVICA Alliance and Co-Chair of the FOREU4ALL Student-Led Community

From November 26th to 28th, 2025, Student Representatives across Europe gathered in Brussels for an un-conference on the democratic future of Higher Education in Europe. Coming from different European University Alliances, they met not only to connect but also to openly identify common challenges, exchange practices, and build mutual support networks.

A broad range of mostly student-led workshops offered a safe space for students and some staff members to get involved in student activities, to discuss pressing questions and exchange experiences of both self-efficacy as well as feeling of being unheard sometimes.

The event was organized by the FOREU4ALL: student-led community for sustainable and democratic student participation, in collaboration with the European Student Union (ESU) and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). ERUA was represented by Zuzanna Siwinska, (ERUA Student Board Member, SWPS),

and ERUA Student Engagement Activities Lead Niki Kasis from the European University Viadrina. Both have been supporting the FOREU4ALL student-led community since its launch in February 2025. It is one of 20 topical groups of FOREU4ALL's community of practice. FOREU4ALL is an EU-funded initiative of the European University Alliances. As a kind of Alliance of alliances, it provides a collaborative and supportive platform for the 73 European University Alliances to come together, share best practices, exchange experiences, and strengthen cooperation.

As an executive committee member in the student-led community, leading the subgroup for Partnerships and collaboration, Zuzanna Siwinska co-facilitated a workshop "Establishing Partnerships", together with representatives from UIREKA SHIFT Alliance. The Workshop involved various perspectives from different countries and universities. It served as an introduction to the subgroup: students gathered and discussed what interna-

INTENSIVE COURSE

tional partnerships look like right now in their environment and how to possibly create a new framework for cooperation.

During the workshop “Inclusion in Higher Education”, Niki Kasis presented the upcoming EU project INST.ALL – Inclusivity for Students in Alliances, together with Lana Par, president of the European Student Union. In the same workshop, Neli Kalinova-Schmieder and Shams Jouve introduced inclusivity approaches and initiatives of the Erasmus Student Network. In the following workshop for “Student Involvement in Governance”, co-facilitated with Seif Zakaria, Student Council Secretary in FORTHEM, and Leon Hebeisen, student representative in EUPeace, both Niki Kasis and Zuzanna Siwinska shared insights into ERUA’s approach to student engagement. On-Boarding in alliances - a challenge for students and staff, the value of Student networking across Europe, and staff supporting students as allies came up as the core topics of the joint discussion.

When asked about the added value of networking among student representatives, Giulia Rebecca Conte answered, “It’s huge.” She is the co-chair of the student-led community and a student representative in the CIVICA Alliance. “We can’t diagnose how well students are doing across European University Alliances if we are not in contact with the rest of Europe”, she said. “Even more importantly, progress depends on shared learning: when we exchange experiences, we empower one another with patched solutions, avoid repeating the same mistakes, and collectively head towards better outcomes. Without this network, good practices remain isolated, but with it, student voices become stronger and impossible to ignore!”

Better together indeed, the Brussels un-conference showed how student leadership and mutual support are driving a more democratic, inclusive, and connected European higher education, in which student voices get heard.



Zuzanna Siwinska facilitating during the workshop “Establishing Partnerships”



Participants during the un-conference



Co-funded by
the European Union

ELIMU

AN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROJECT CENTERED ON EDUCATION



Ana Díaz Hernández,
Nenna Arakcheeva El Kori,
Prof. Ana María Blanco
Marigorta and Prof. Noemi
Melián Martel (ULPGC)

Quality education is often discussed in terms of standards and performance. However, reliable infrastructure, laboratory materials, and classroom equipment are essential tangible resources that enable teachers to deliver effective lessons and support students in learning successfully.

Despite its natural resource potential, Kenya continues to face substantial economic challenges, particularly in rural areas. The World Bank's Second Kenya Social and Economic Inclusion Project: Project Information Document (2025) reports that 35% of households live below the poverty line, while the Kenya Poverty Report: Based on the 2021 Kenya Continuous Household Survey (KNBS, 2023) indicates that 4.4 million households were below the national poverty line in 2023. In addition, the Government of Kenya's 2023 Education Sector Report highlights inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure in learning institutions, including classrooms and water and sanitation facilities.

If basic needs are the roots of education, then intangible tools are the stem: motivated teachers and students, overcoming language barriers in the classroom, curiosity and enthusiasm of the students, and community support that carries learning forward and allows education to grow.

How can quality education be provided without access to basic resources such as water and electricity?

Currently, the Timboni Primary School located in Kilifi County on the coast of Kenya has approximately 800 students and 16 teachers.

During the summer of 2023, the school had no access to clean water or electricity. Although the school was previously connected to the grid, they were later forced to disconnect due to unaffordable costs, caused by neighbours illegally tapping into the network.

The school was in a critical situation. When we first arrived at the school, the kids collected water from a cauldron using shared cups to drink it. The septic tanks they used were in a poor hygienic condition.

Some subjects such as Computer Science are taught without computers, simply by explaining on the blackboard, and sometimes drawing the screens of office programs to show how they work.

Based on our observation, children under such conditions face several challenges. Some students leave the school

Our observations

because they must work either to support their families while others leave for personal reasons.

The reality for teachers is also very challenging. With a teacher-student ratio of one teacher for 70 students, teachers face a class full of students at mixed levels. Some of them are facing language barriers in English, requiring teachers to teach in Swahili.

Our project

The Elimu Project was established in 2023 by professors Ana María Blanco Marigorta and Noemi Melián Martel, followed by the creation of our association, Mambo Elimu, in 2024. The Project and the Association are carried out entirely by volunteer professors and students from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi.

Across the three editions of the project, more than 40 students have participated, with 15 of them working on site. Our volunteers work throughout the year organizing fundraising activities, drafting projects, seeking solutions to the problems faced by schools such as Timboni and preparing experiments and lessons.

All of our initiatives have been possible thanks to the financial support by individuals and organizations such as Colegio Oficial de Ingenieros Industriales de Canarias Oriental (Official College of Oriental Canary Islands Industrial Engineers) and Colegio Oficial de Fisioter-

apeutas de Canarias (Official College of Canary Islands Physiotherapists).

Our field work

The first actions taken at the Timboni School in 2023 were to install two photovoltaic systems. One activated the water pumping system and the other provided electricity to the school module. The availability of fresh water motivated the school to create a garden, where they managed to grow food, and to compete with the rest of the schools in the area

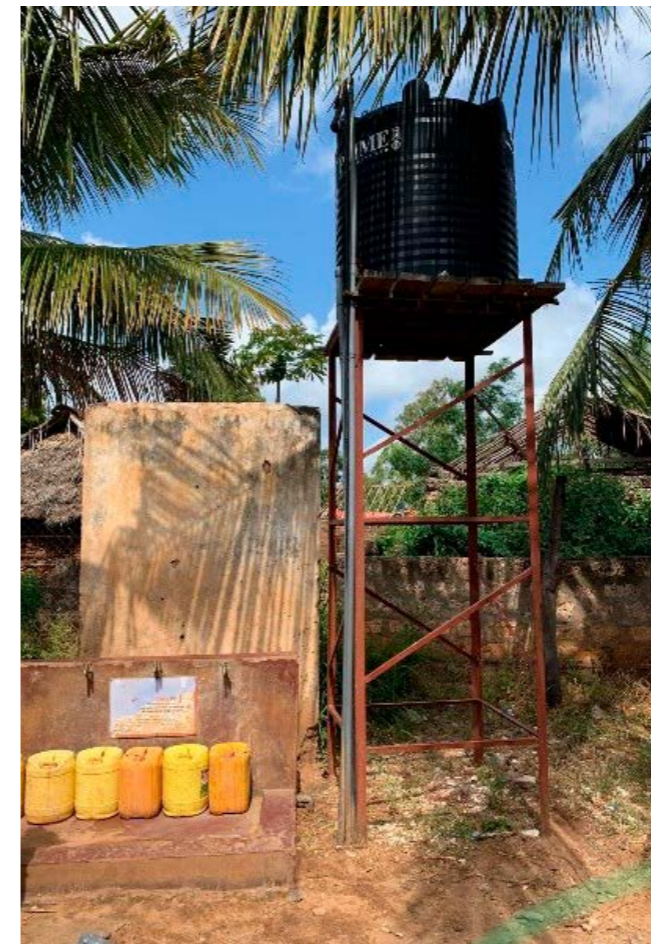
The electricity provided not only helped the school, but also covered the water supply of the surrounding community, which meant that families could stop walking kilometers just to find fresh water.

The next major step in 2024 was to establish a science laboratory.

The establishment of the science lab was a significant project milestone, bringing science closer to the students and motivating them to continue their studies. It also gave them the opportunity to put the theoretical knowledge they learn into practice.

In order to provide electricity to the remaining zones, including the teacher's area and the classrooms for younger students, we installed additional solar panels and substituted the older ones from a previous project that were not functional.

During the establishment of the laboratory, we conducted science experiments. We brought basic materials given that the school had very limited resources, and we wanted students to experi-



SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

ence science as something they can do, not just read about.

Our teaching did not end with the experiments. We also prepared materials based on the official textbooks for Maths, English, Science, and Computer Science, and taught these subjects throughout our stay in the area.

Thanks to a donation of computers from the vocational training centre CIFP Villa de Agüimes, the children at Timboni were able to learn independently including using the Office programs by themselves. In math lessons, an interactive tool called BAFI, created by primary school teacher Esperanza Teixidor, has helped students to hold both two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes.

The project didn't stay in the classroom, it also involved sport and games. With a donation from C.D. San Pedro Mártir de Doctoral, the Timboni School F.C. received football kits, with which they could play a series of outdoor games and activities, including a football match.

In 2025, we visited St. Martins School in the Kibera in Nairobi. We assessed the school's state in order to organize future project actions at this school.

We also installed a photovoltaic (PV) system at the Tewa Training Centre. The centre equips female students with hospitality skills that enhance their chances of finding employment in the highly touristic Kilifi area, thereby contributing to local economic activity.

With the photovoltaic installation, they are significantly reducing their electricity and fuel bills. They will invest the spare money in creating scholarships for girls in the village.

In addition, we carried out various initiatives in Timboni, such as conducting scientific experiments and equipping the laboratory with chairs.

Local companies and workers were hired to install all the systems and to build the furniture, which promotes local economic growth. Our volunteers assisted local workers with the facilities, enabling them to practice the knowledge they acquired at the School of Engineering.

Future actions

Some of our goals for future editions are to improve the infrastructure of the St. Martins School, to provide sanitary pads throughout the school year, school supplies, to pay for national exam fees and to continue with the photovoltaic installation in Tewa.

Project value

The project is focused towards generating social impact in both Kenyan and Canarian contexts through mutual learning and cooperation. It should not be seen as a one-sided initiative, but as an exchange in which Kenyan communities and institutions actively shape the process, while Canarian participants also learn from the partnership.



THE CHINESE CLUB OF THE ULPGC

ITS BEGINNINGS, TRAJECTORY, AND RELEVANCE



Montserrat Maldonado Arévalo (ULPGC)

The beginning of everything

One 2023 day, in one of my second-year Chinese lessons, our professor, Esmeralda Padrón, came to class and shared the revolutionary idea that she and Antares Pérez de Amézaga, Chinese professor and anthropologist, had come up with: creating a space dedicated to Chinese language and culture. She was so excited talking about it! Her enthusiasm was contagious, and I was so eager to join and start the adventure. Of course, you can't start a club without people, so you have to first find people who believe in it as much as you do. Antares and Esmeralda were well aware of this. They asked for our help and each of us said yes. I fondly remember our first meeting—most of us barely knew each other, but we hit it off as soon as we started discussing the club. Although we brainstormed future activities, we focused more on organising what would be the best possible first chapter: an inaugural event combining everything we're passionate about. At our next meeting, Samuel, a cinephile and current PhD student who loves writing, brought the script he had written for a short film that we would later act in, shoot, and project at the beginning of the act. "Carta de un club desconocido" (2024), (Letter from an unknown club), the title of a short film written and directed by student Samuel D. Calcines, along with the play Esmeralda wrote, which many of us performed at the event, marked the official start of the club. Inspired by the Legend of the Four Dragons, the play featured a choir of four members, each representing one of the dragons, which also included elements of Greek choirs and Chinese opera. The cast

included an expert on dragons, a messenger with an urgent letter to deliver, a dragon dance performed by students Nicolás and Celia, and witty dialogue referencing "Vino Griego" (Greek Wine) by Canarian songwriter José Vélez. By including elements from Greco-Latin, Chinese, and Canarian origins, we made a statement about what the Chinese Club is: a place for mutual understanding and mutual nourishment. Even the skies participated in the play, as it began to rain and we could hear the soft drizzle from inside the theatre. That February afternoon, something magical happened—the dragon arrived at our university to stay.

During the last year and a half, the Chi-

Our talks, workshops, collaborations and participation in other events

nese Club has brought people together through talks on topics such as videogames, feng shui, Sinitic languages and the evolution of their dialects, and feminism. In addition to these, we've also organised two thematic conference series. During the month of May 2024, we held our I Audiovisual Conference Series. Thanks to each speaker, we had the opportunity to learn about the entertainment industry of China as well as the history of Chinese cinema through the analysis of films and Chinese dramas, including LGBTQ+ media. In the second one, our I San Mao Conference Series: "Between Deserts and Oceans", the famous female writer and translator

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

San Mao was the central thread. Inspired by the need to know and examine the extent of her significance in the Canary Islands, especially as we're Canarian people ourselves, we decided to analyse her literary work regarding feminism, grief, and the portrayal of Canarian people in her writing. Our love for literature has also motivated us to host a literary exhibition made from the books in Chinese we own. Throughout last year, it travelled to all the faculties of our university in Gran Canaria. When I think about our workshops, I can't help but to remember the conversational Spanish and Chinese workshop we did for native speakers of both languages, and to laugh remembering how we acted out scenarios. The Chinese students and teachers who came had to speak in Spanish, and Canarians had to do it in Chinese. It was hilarious and such a nice way to practice speaking! Equally important are our Chinese calligraphy workshops. We not only learn and teach Chinese calligraphy to each other, but also to younger students in events such as "¡Cuánto Talento!", in which we've participated twice, both in the islands of Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura. Similarly, we have collaborated with our faculty, which has supported us so much since the club came to life, and the Students Delegation of our faculty for International Women's Day and for the yearly "Jornadas Filológicas" with traditional Chinese games and Chinese book-binding workshops. Being involved in the 10th anniversary ceremony of Chinese Studies in the Degree in Hispanic Philology was a dream come true. There were so many people and so much ardour involved, from the students who

performed the play "The Creation of Humankind" inspired by the myth of Nüwa, to the mixture of Canarian oral tradition and Chinese with "décimas" (poetry) by Yeray Rodríguez Quintana and other students, who did it in Chinese. When it comes to our international projection, some of our members were selected for the II Encontro de Sinologia da Universidade de São Paulo that took place online last November, and coordinators Esmeralda and Antares attended the 2024 World Chinese Language Conference representing the ULPGC and the Chinese Club. Ultimately, as the Bottom-up project Exploring China, in which many of our members are involved, ended up winning and it will become a reality in Lithuania, we're so excited about what's to come!



KNEADING IS DEMOCRACY

WHEN THEORY LEAVES THE LECTURE HALL

NGO MED



What does democracy look like outside of political science textbooks? For the team of “Kneading is Democracy” (“Месенето е Демокрация), or, abbreviated, “MED” (МЕД), the answer is simple: a process in which you partici-

pate, vote, discuss, and accept the consequences of your decisions.

It all began as a student idea at New Bulgarian University. In the beginning, there wasn't a predetermined model or formula - there was a group of mass communications and political science students motivated to talk about democracy in an understandable and accessible way. Democracy is not something abstract, rather it is like a pastry that is “kneaded” by people through different viewpoints and compromises. In Bulgarian, the word “месене” has a double meaning - while it literally means “kneading”, it also refers to the phrase “месея се” = “I interfere” or “I take part of”. So “Kneading is Democracy” is a play on these words. When abbreviated, the name becomes “МЕД” / “MED”, which literally means “honey” in Bulgarian - a sweet and natural concept, that most enjoy.

With Viktor Zhelyazov and Sofia Tsolova from Mass Communications faculty, and Volen Stefanov, Elena Indzheva, Lea Simonne, Maria Pelovska and Emila-Lilia Petrova, students from Political Science department at NBU being involved, 7 of the organization's founding members are working actively and relentlessly towards its cause.

Inception and Goals

The organisation began its journey in January of 2025 when a team of Bulgarian students from New Bulgarian University took part in the international PILLAR project. This project was organized in partnership with CIDC-AUBG - the Center for

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

Information, Democracy and Citizenship, and EdVenture Partners. The main goal of the initiative was to encourage young people from various countries to practice their right to democratic engagement. The campaign the NBU students came up with is called MED, or “Kneading Is Democracy,” which serves as a metaphor for society as dough that needs the right ingredients, engagement in the process, and care to rise into a healthy, pleasant, and democratic environment.

After winning the contest, the team decided to continue its mission by establishing a non-governmental organization dedicated to spreading democratic values. Since then, the organization has broadened its horizons and continues to visit educational institutions, delivering its message to dozens of young students. Thus, “Kneading is Democracy” transforms into a principle, a mindset to be used on a daily basis.

The organization strives to introduce more critical thinking among young people and to show that making a difference in the world stems from their choices and activity. It operates on the ideology that living in a democratic world means that each person should have the power to speak out, to protest against situations that do not align with their values, and to incorporate the freedom of speech into their daily lives. These aspects are not luxuries but rather their given right. When societies deviate from this then they give away these rights to the people who make their decisions for them.

Core Activities and Methodology

MED’s methodology consists of stimulating young people to have a better understanding of democracy, civic engagement, and the importance of active participation and intervention in daily social problems. The project is conducted through live presentations to a young audience, ranging in age from 15 to 29 years old (9th to 12th grade in schools and 1st to 4th year in universities), and is combined with visual materials and interactive surveys accessible through QR codes.

The core idea is presented within a game format, where each participant faces dilemmas from everyday social life. Participants must decide between two possible solutions, each of which leads to a different outcome. When each participant makes their decision, the votes are counted, and the game continues with the answer mutually chosen by the majority. The “mutual agreement” segment of the game allows for discussions about personal responsibility, active participation in societal problems, and the way their “kneading” (involvement) in issues that may not be personally related to them are also important. An important message is how they, as parts of society, can navigate both their own path and that of society through active involvement.

MED’s mission is to reach as many people as possible and to engage them through a gamified multi-layered approach. This leads toward a democratic and engaged community. This approach is etched in principles of engaged dialogue as well as active participation from the youth.

ERUA STUDENT MANIFESTO FOR SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION



Document by students of the Blue Commission

ERUA Blue Commission representative Samuel Taviro (ULPGC) presenting the Manifesto to ERUA's Rectors at the ERUA Summit in Lesbos

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

This ERUA Student Manifesto for Sustainable Higher Education reflects the collective vision and effort of all the students of the Blue Commission of ERUA. We call each institution, represented by its rectors, for action with a set of recommendations shaped by collaboration and purpose. We ultimately support ERUA's commitment towards a greener, just and more resilient future.

Mytilene, November 6th, 2025

The Blue commission embraces sustainability as its cornerstone and as students we are aware that the future depends on us. We are committed to taking responsibility and doing everything we can to drive the change our society needs. A sustainable higher education must be the result of a broad engagement at all levels, stronger coordination, sustained effort, resources and collaboration. The result of embedding sustainability in strategic plans, budgets and governance structures, while empowering students and staff to lead, learn and innovate. The result of a joint commitment that runs through the whole institution: from studies and curriculum, innovation and research-transfer, to campus operations. The result of recognizing that sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing the historical and structural inequalities that continue to shape our institutions and societies.

We believe a change of this magnitude at a university level will result in a domino effect, with positive impact beyond academia, on the whole community. Universities cannot only be spaces of innovation but also of inclusion and plurality. Despite

the tumultuous and worrying events that are currently taking place on our planet, we firmly defend that there still is room for hope and change, and each one of us holds the power to trigger them, starting from universities.

The ERUA knowledge ecosystem plays a key role in this. The work of the Blue Commission benefited from the ongoing support of the ERUA administrative leadership, the official body on sustainability (Green and Inclusive Committee), the network established through WP7 on Student Engagement, ERUA's Student Board, and the wider ERUA community as a whole. Thus, recognizing ERUA's potential of reforming and shaping just, resilient, and future-ready societies.

Based on the considerations above, we propose 35 first steps, clustered around the different sustainability chapters, to boost the performance of ERUA institutions and engage in an ongoing dialogue about priorities and next targets in creating and maintaining positive change. These recommendations are ambitious yet grounded in reality. They build on the creativity and commitment of

students, the expertise of staff and faculty, and the support of external partners.

By integrating governance, student engagement, operations, education, research and partnerships, the alliance can model an overarching approach to environmental stewardship and social and global justice, acknowledging that climate change and environmental degradation are rooted in historical and structural inequalities, including colonialism and extractive globalization.

Ultimately, universities were founded as gateways to knowledge and research, but they also bear the responsibility of transmitting its results to society. We firmly believe that higher education communities play a crucial role in shaping the future, and as part of them, we call for a more purposeful use of our shared resources to reach our common goal: creating a better tomorrow.

The success of this effort will be measured not by reduced emissions or increased recycling rates but by the culture it fosters: a culture of care for the planet and for each other, one that values diversity and inclusion, and a culture that embraces and drives innovation while respecting tradition. By embracing this vision, ERUA contributes to a more sustainable, just and resilient world.

BLUE COMMISSION MEMBERS: (updated February 2026)

- **EUV:** Muhammad Ismail, Faiza Latif, Sedat Yilidirim
- **NBU:** Dilyana Molerova
- **MRU:** Nahian Asfaque
- **SWPS:** Wiktoria Łuczak, Julia Marczak, Zofia Rozanska
- **UNIMC:** Lucrezia Cinella, Sami Ghanmi, Zuzanna Luczak, Masa Mitic, Elena Paniccià
- **UP8:** Hermon Kitenge, Valentin Loubet, Clémentine Pourbaix
- **UAegean:** Evelina Bragkina, Thomas Kalaitzis, Stavros Kalognomos, Maria Kasimati-Rizou, Kyriaki Vasileiou, Evangelos Zaftis
- **ULPGC:** Ibai Aramburuzabala Arrieta, Aghlahoum Mbeirik Abderahmane (Kaluna), Alaa Elgeoushi Gomaa, Marcos Prado, Camila Ramírez Rivadeneira

- **Former members:** Clara Barth, Maria Ioanna Dritsa, Alessandra Gierszewska, Toni Kondeva, Pamela Kostadinova, Maïa Kuete, Aleksandra Michalczyk, Samuel Taviro Rodríguez-Brusco, Yuliana Shuhani, Vasiliki Tsamicha, Aleksandra Woźnica

The Blue Commission has been supported by the participants of the ERUA Young Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change that was organized by the Blue Commission in May 2025 at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY:

- Franziska Mohaupt, Advisor for Sustainability and Organisational Development (Bundesverband Soziokultur/ German Association of Socioculture)
- Fernando Jesús Medina Morales, Associated Professor in Geography and Sustainability (University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria)
- Dr Luana Martin-Russu, Researcher, Sustainability Experience Lab
- Sahra Damus, Sustainability Officer (European University Viadrina)

Recommendations:

CLIMATE ACTION

1. Increase investment in infrastructure and systems that enable low-carbon, resource-efficient campuses, by installing renewable energy generators such as photovoltaic plants or systems and phase out the use of fossil or nuclear power, as both cause significant environmental impacts and risks.

2. Reduce energy consumption by replacing incandescent and fluorescent bulbs with LEDs, installing motion sensors and daylight controls, and ensuring proper maintenance. LEDs use up to 75 % less energy and last ten times longer than incandescent bulbs. In addition, in the longer term, measures should be taken for the new infrastructure to ensure the maximization of daylight use. This can be achieved by installing larger and strategically placed windows, use of partitions, skylights, light tubes and choosing light-reflective colours for more effective light distribution.
3. Have conforming consumption by making sure that all lights in the campus comply with what is stated by the STARLIGHT foundation awarded to areas that certify sky quality representing protection and conservation.
4. Use low-consumption energy, save in heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems by upgrading to high efficiency boilers and chillers, insulating pipes and ducts, and implementing smart controls. Regular maintenance prevents energy loss due to leaks or malfunctioning equipment.
5. Reduce unnecessary energy use by improving insulation, sealing air leaks and installing double or triple glazed windows. Energy perfor-

mance certificates (EPCs) can guide renovation priorities.

6. Mitigate climate-related risks by creating specific regulations to be implemented during heat- or cold-waves resulting from climate change. Commit to improving building insulation and seeking solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

WATER AND MARINE RESOURCES

7. Improve sustainable water consumption opportunities on campus by installing water recharging points and thereby limiting single use bottles. Placement should consider high foot traffic areas and accessibility. Stations should be well maintained, monitored for quality and accessible to people with disabilities. Signage and awareness campaigns remind users to bring their own bottles.
8. Save water and save costs by harvesting rainwater. Collecting rainwater from rooftops can supply irrigation, toilet flushing or cooling towers. Proper filtration is required for potable uses. In drought prone regions, rainwater harvesting can buffer against water scarcity.
9. Use water efficient fixtures like low flow taps, dual flush toilets and waterless urinals to reduce consump-

tion. Retrofitting older buildings yields large savings. Sensors can prevent

RESOURCE USE AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

taps from running unattended.

10. Use clearly labelled bins to monitor the types and amounts of waste streams produced. Place recycling, compost, and waste bins in convenient locations in all campuses and buildings. Use consistent colour coding and signage that includes images and multiple languages. Consider accessibility for people with disabilities.
11. Promote a transition from a take-make-waste linear economy into a circular economy: all acquired products and services should be on their full life cycles, considering raw material extraction, manufacturing, transport, use and disposal. Where possible, choose reusable, recyclable or compostable materials.
12. Conduct food waste audits to identify where waste occurs. Offer smaller portion sizes or allow meal customization to reduce waste. Also, provide leftover options at reduced prices toward closing time.
13. Eliminate disposable items and phase out single use objects. Provide durable alternatives (e.g., stainless

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

objects) that can be reused. Plus encouraging personal reusable containers by offering discounts or loyalty points to anyone who brings their own mugs, bottles and lunch boxes. Communicate this incentive clearly to the whole community.

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS

14. Allocate funds to allow regular sustainability events and campaigns: such as sustainability weeks, climate festivals, creation of spaces for pollinators, environmentally friendly cafes and film screenings to raise awareness and inspire participation. Ensure that events are inclusive, multicultural and accessible to all. Use creative formats (arts, theatre) to engage people emotionally.
15. Universities must prioritize the introduction of native plants in their green spaces, endemic when possible, and prevent the arrival of invasive species. Avoiding the use of damaging pesticides and creating community shared gardening spaces where both endemic plants, pollinators and other living beings may foster. A nature en ville approach fosters biodiversity, ecological resilience and environmental responsibility on campus.

POLLUTION

16. Promote the use of greener transport options such as bicycles and scooters by installing more parking slots and renewable energy-powered charging points. Plus, negotiate subsidised public transport or passes for students and staff. Coordinate timetables with lecture schedules to reduce waiting times and reduce commuters using private vehicles.
17. Use carpooling platforms. Develop digital platforms to match commuters from the same neighbourhood. Provide designated carpool parking spaces and incentives (e.g. reduced parking fees).
18. Adopt academic mobility policies. For staff and students travelling between campuses or conferences, adopt guidelines that prioritise rail and slower travel over air travel for journeys under a certain duration (e.g., 4.5 hours). Provide financial incentives (e.g. reimbursement up to the cost of the equivalent flight ticket) to encourage train use. Require carbon accounting for all travel and use the data to set reduction targets.

OWN WORKFORCE

19. Embed sustainability positions and programmes into core budgets. Instead of relying exclusively on external grants, institutions should allocate funds for sustainability officers, student project grants and infrastructure improvements.
20. Include sustainability-related matters into existing courses. Lecturers can integrate examples of sustainability into business, engineering, arts, social science and humanities courses. For example, an architecture course might explore biomimicry, while a literature course examines eco criticism.
21. Climate activism often involves confronting distressing information, so provide mental health support and spaces for collective care, such as reflection circles. Universities shall be used as a forum for difficult discussions with other stakeholders.
22. Improve partnership relations with sustainability related associations or enterprises by building and maintaining partnerships. This might require time, funding and skilled staff. Universities should allocate resources for partnership coordination and recognise the workload involved avoiding any risk of unintended paternalistic dynamics. Clear communication,

co-creation and transparent decision-making are key.

VALUE CHAIN PARTNERS AND SUPPLIERS

23. Ensure that suppliers uphold labour rights, gender equality and fair wages. Social sustainability is integral to environmental sustainability and should not be overlooked.
24. Engage the supply chain. Vendors and producers should understand how to introduce sustainability practices, encourage improvements and incorporate sustainability criteria into tenders. For example, cafeteria suppliers might be required to provide organic and fairtrade products, minimise packaging and offer plant-based options. Don't use paving stones produced through child labor or other products whose manufacturing processes harm nature, the climate, or human well-being.

AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

25. Support and give priority to local and regional products: Purchasing from local farmers and businesses supports regional economies, reduces transport emissions and fosters community partnerships. This must balance seasonal availability and cost considerations.

STUDENTS WELLBEING

26. Address food justice by ensuring that plant-based meal options are affordable and culturally appropriate. Avoid alienating certain communities by providing allergen information and involving student groups in menu planning to accommodate dietary restrictions (e.g., halal, kosher, gluten free).
27. Address barriers to participation. Students from low-income backgrounds may lack time or resources to volunteer; provide stipends, flexible schedules and childcare options when organising events. Students with disabilities may need accessible locations and materials in multiple formats.
28. Create a program to train students as “sustainability ambassadors” who facilitate workshops, lead campus tours highlighting green features and act as liaisons between their peers and the sustainability office.
29. Ensure proper student training and foster research projects to prepare students to drive the green transition through training opportunities, such as:
 - A) Workshops on project management, leadership and communication. These can be delivered by students,

university staff, external trainers or alumni. Topics might include budgeting, event planning, conflict resolution and public speaking.

- B) Support research regarding environmental justice and climate change in partnership with affected communities by offering scholarships for non-EU students.
- C) Technical training. Provide sessions on composting, energy auditing or lifecycle assessment. Practical skills enable students to implement projects effectively.
- D) Policy literacy. Educate students about EU climate policies, institutional governance structures and funding mechanisms. Understanding the policy landscape helps students navigate bureaucracy and advocate effectively. understand the complex interplay of environmental, social and economic systems, preparing them to drive the green transition.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONDUCT/ ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

30. Engage in policy advocacy by participating in local policy discussions on sustainability (e.g., bike lane expansions, waste collection systems). Uni-

versities should provide scientific evidence and test innovative solutions.

31. Involve diverse stakeholders (including students) in decision making, ensuring that policies are informed by multiple perspectives and lived experiences.
32. Foster cultural dimension related education. Culture shapes how we see the world, how we relate to each other, and how we imagine our future. Through art, storytelling, and dialogue for Earth universities can nurture more empathy between people and the environment around us. We need to bring human and planetary dimensions of education closer together, and the cultural dimension is a bridge for it.
33. Promote ERUA sustainability awareness and create a joint campus through competitions and challenges: host sustainability competitions (e.g., energy saving challenges

in dorms, zero waste challenges in cafeterias) with small prizes or recognition. We believe gamification encourages participation.

34. Assess environmental performance in all events and conferences hosted by our institutions. Organisers should measure emissions associated with travel, catering waste, and resource consumption, and include a self-evaluation of waste management practice.
35. Ensure financing to organise the Young Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change as an annual initiative allowing discussions and connections between students interested in this topic. Rotate hosting among campuses. Holding the forum on different campuses each year exposes participants to diverse contexts and encourages local communities to engage. Virtual participation should remain an option to reduce travel and increase accessibility.

For background about ERUA Blue Commission and ERUA STUDENT MANIFESTO FOR SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION, refer to [page 12 - Blue Commission Manifesto](#).

WHEN ENVIRONMENTAL AMBITION MEETS REALITY AND WHY EUROPE'S GREEN POLICIES STRUGGLE TO BE SEEN?



Lea Simonne, (NBU, Department of Political Sciences)

The European Union is often portrayed as a global leader in environmental and climate action. Over the years, it has developed ambitious targets, long-term strategies, and an increasingly dense legal framework to address climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. It was precisely the contrast between strong political ambition and uneven results on the ground that led me to focus my research on European environmental policies. As I explored how these policies are implemented and communicated, a central question gradually emerged: why do policies that appear so ambitious on paper so often struggle to become visible, tangible realities for citizens?

This article offers a glimpse into a broader research project that eventually developed into a bachelor's thesis titled 'Environmental Policies and Public Communication: Between European Frameworks and Bulgarian Realities (2007–2025)'. Using Bulgaria as a case study, the research examines how European environmental policies are designed at the EU level, how they are communicated, and how they are perceived by citizens at the national level. Spanning the period from Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007 to 2025, the study argues that the effectiveness of environmental policies depends not only on legal frameworks and targets, but also on communication, visibility, and public understanding.

THE EUROPEAN UNION SEEN FROM BELOW

At the European level, environmental policy has become increasingly struc-

tured, ambitious, and binding. Insights from the citizen survey conducted for this thesis reveal a striking paradox. The survey, conducted among 105 respondents, combined closed, multiple-choice and one open-ended question to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. While environmental concerns are widely shared, the European Union often remains an abstract actor in the public imagination. Respondents expressed strong concern about air pollution, waste management, and climate change, but only a small number were able to identify concrete European actions linked to these issues.

This gap highlights a disconnect between political ambition and citizen perception. The EU produces an impressive volume of strategies, roadmaps, and legislative packages, yet these efforts rarely translate into a clear and accessible narrative connected to everyday life. For many respondents, environmental policy feels omnipresent in political discourse but largely absent from daily experience. Rather than rejecting European action, citizens often simply fail to recognise it.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TECHNOCRACY AND PEDAGOGY

One of the key findings of the research concerns the way environmental policies are communicated at the European level. Despite their ambition, these policies are frequently framed in highly technical language, saturated with acronyms and abstract concepts. Terms such as carbon neutrality, Fit for 55, ETS, MACF, LULUCF, or circular economy structure European pol-

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

icymaking, but remain largely inaccessible to non-specialists.

While this technocratic precision is useful for institutional coordination, it creates a significant distance between the EU and its citizens. Environmental policies risk being perceived as complex, imposed, or disconnected from real-life concerns. Although the EU has launched communication campaigns to address this issue, these initiatives often reach only already-engaged audiences. The absence of simple, relatable explanations weakens public ownership and limits the mobilising potential of environmental action.

FROM EUROPE TO BULGARIA, WHEN POLICIES MEET REALITY...

This analytical framework becomes particularly revealing when applied to Bulgaria. Since 2007, the country has formally aligned its legislation with European environmental standards. On paper, compliance appears substantial. In practice, however, implementation has been slow and uneven. Structural weaknesses, institutional fragmentation, limited administrative capacity, and crucially the low political prioritisation of environmental issues at the national level continue to hinder progress. Environmental policy is often treated as a secondary or technical dossier, overshadowed by short-term economic, social, or electoral concerns.

The citizen survey confirms a persistent gap between environmental concern and knowledge of public action. While respondents clearly identify environmental degradation as a major issue, many express

scepticism toward institutions and limited awareness of existing policies. In a context where environmental issues rarely occupy a central place in political discourse, European measures are often filtered through national politics, diluted by weak or inconsistent communication, or lost entirely in translation before reaching citizens.

BEYOND AMBITION, THE QUESTION OF UNDERSTANDING

Ultimately, this research suggests that the European Union does not suffer from a lack of environmental ambition, but from a lack of shared understanding. Policies that are well designed but poorly communicated risk remaining invisible, regardless of their potential impact. Bridging the gap between Brussels and citizens is therefore not a secondary challenge, but a central condition for the success of Europe's green transition.

This article presents only a snapshot of a broader research project, but it raises a fundamental question: in a time of climate urgency, can Europe afford environmental policies that citizens struggle to see, understand, or feel part of?

This article is a summary and an adapted excerpt of the bachelor's thesis "Environmental Policies and Public Communication: Between European Frameworks and Bulgarian Realities (2007-2025)"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atanasova, A. Naydenov, K. Perceptions of the Barriers to the Implementation of a Successful Climate Change Policy in Bulgaria. *Climate*, 13(2), Article 40. 2025.

Eichhorn, J. Grabbe, H. Europeans Still Want Climate Action, but Don't Trust Governments to Deliver. *Policy Brief*. 2025.

European Commission. *Environmental Implementation Review 2025: Bulgaria Fact-sheet*. Brussels: Publications Office of the European Union. 2025.

European Commission. *EU Policy Framework for Climate and Energy (2020 to 2030)*. EUR-Lex. 2014.

European Environment Agency (EEA) *Waste Recycling in Europe*. 2025.

European Investment Bank (EIB). *58% of Bulgarians in Favour of Stricter Government Measures Imposing Behavioural Changes to Address the Climate Emergency*. Press release. 2021.

Krastanova, R. *The Green Movement and The Green Parties in Bulgaria: Between Systemic Integration and Systematic Change*. 2010.

MOEW Bulgaria. *RIOSV Make Maps of the Illegal Dumps in the Country*. www.moew.government.bg. 2025.

Nikolov, K. *Euractiv. Bulgarian Authorities Criticised for Concealing the Reality of Air Pollution*. Euractiv France. 2024.

AT THE EDGE OF CHANGE

ART AS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Natali Todorova (NBU)

The edge of new beginnings

We gather at the edge not of endings but of beginnings. The 2025 ERUA Annual Summit was all about navigating the edges between disciplines and institutions, between the known and the possible. In this liminal space, art emerges not as a luxury but as a language of survival: documenting, disrupting, and dreaming. It is simultaneously the archive of our past and the blueprint of our future.

So, we should ask ourselves, and the institutions around us: What does sustainability mean when the canvas is culture and the medium is imagination? Does it transcend the material? Sustainable art is not merely about ecological resources; it is also about processes that resist

burnout, institutions that support without silencing, and audiences that engage without reducing creativity to consumption. It is about amplifying local voices within global conversations, ensuring that cultural diversity becomes a cornerstone of resilience.

This alliance of eight different universities embodies this vision as a constellation of creativity committed to inclusion, innovation, and democratic renewal. Here, art meets science, research encounters resistance, and education transforms into emancipation. Through performances, visual storytelling, and collaborative projects, the arts serve as a link that can create pathways between disciplines and lived realities. This enables us to imagine futures that are inclusive, sustainable, and emotionally resonant.

Student-led initiatives, in particular, demonstrate how forgotten spaces can

be reactivated, turning remote campuses into hubs of dialogue or small exhibitions into catalysts for civic engagement. These gestures are not symbolic alone; they are acts of care, presence, and resistance.

In this spirit, being part of ERUA means learning to listen to local voices, to regional rhythms, and to the silent urgencies of our time. It invites us to ask: How can we co-create knowledge that does not remain enclosed within academia, that does not just circulate within academia, but reaches communities, inspires action, and heals divides?

The road ahead

It is precisely this attentiveness that leads us toward the next step. To speak of sustainability and the future is also to speak of poetic futures, visions that honour complexity and invite imagination. Perhaps the most radical gesture we can make is to continue asking questions: What kind of world do we want to belong to, and how can we shape it together, from the edges?

It is precisely this attentiveness that is not only methodological; it is ethical and imaginative, reminding us that sustainability is not only ecological but epistemic, cultural, and relational. Within this broader rethinking of how we imagine and co-create futures, new forms of collaboration are already emerging.

In this evolving landscape, students increasingly engage with artificial intelligence not only as a tool but as a collaborator. Whether in composing music, curating exhibitions, or writing code, AI becomes

part of the creative process, sometimes amplifying, sometimes challenging, always provoking reflection. Yet this collaboration raises profound questions: Can an algorithm grasp the emotional weight of memory or the cultural nuance of a gesture? How do we ensure that technologies serve communities rather than abstract systems?

For many, AI has opened new forms of storytelling, blending data with dreams, expanding the canvas rather than replacing the artist. In this sense, AI can become a bridge of connection and extend the reach of imagination while reminding us of the irreplaceable human capacity for empathy and meaning.

When we speak of artificial intelligence as a collaborator, we must also acknowledge its material footprint. Training and maintaining large-scale AI systems requires vast amounts of energy and water for cooling data centres and powering infrastructures. These are not abstract costs but ecological and social ones, often concentrated in regions already vulnerable to climate stress. To imagine sustainable futures with AI, we must therefore ask not only what it can create with us, but also what it consumes on our behalf.

At the edge of change, art and imagination are not peripheral but central to sustainability. They allow us to envision futures that are not only technologically advanced but also ethically grounded, culturally inclusive, and emotionally resonant. To embrace art as a necessity is to acknowledge that survival itself is a creative act, one that requires us to listen, to imagine, and to act purposefully, together.

FROM POPULISM TO SUCCESS

STRATEGIES AND ELECTORAL PSYCHO PROFILES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES SWORD (MECH) AND GREATNESS (VELICHIE) IN THE WAKE OF 2023-2024 ELECTIONS



Maria Pelovska (NBU, Department
of Political Sciences)

This article is a summary and an adapted excerpt of the bachelor's thesis "Environmental Policies and Public Communication: Between European Frameworks and Bulgarian Realities (2007-2025)"

Situated within the broader European trend of growing electoral support for populist and anti-establishment movements, this study examines how new Bulgarian political actors have transformed widespread public discontent into rapid political success. Rather than treating the Bulgarian case as an isolated anomaly, the Bachelor's degree thesis that this article will observe situates it within a comparative European framework, highlighting shared structural conditions, communication patterns, and socio-psychological mechanisms. The focus is placed on the emergence, communication strategies, and voter profiles of two new Bulgarian political formations - "Sword" (MECH) and "Greatness" (Velichie) - which gained significant visibility and electoral relevance in the aftermath of the 2023 - 2024 elections.

The research begins by outlining the unprecedented political instability in Bulgaria between 2021 and 2024, characterized by repeated parliamentary elections, short-lived governments, low electoral turnout, and declining trust in political institutions. Similar to developments observed in other European democracies, prolonged governance crises and perceived elite failure undermined the legitimacy of traditional parties and created a political vacuum. In Bulgaria, as in Italy, France, or Germany, this vacuum enabled new actors to present themselves as mor-

al, national, and anti-system alternatives, explicitly opposing entrenched elites and claiming to restore popular sovereignty.

The thesis' theoretical framework combines contemporary populism theory with insights from classical crowd psychology. Drawing on Cas Mudde's concept of populism as a thin-centred ideology, the thesis conceptualizes populism as a moral division between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." This ideological core is complemented by Benjamin Moffitt's understanding of populism as a political style, emphasizing performance, emotionalization, and the strategic construction of crisis. Kurt Weyland's strategic approach further highlights the importance of charismatic leadership and opportunistic mobilization in periods of institutional instability. These perspectives are enriched through the work of Gustave Le Bon, which help explain emotional contagion, leader identification, and the reduction of rational deliberation within mass political behavior.

Within this framework, the thesis demonstrates that "Sword" and "Greatness" combine ideological antagonism with highly performative, emotionally charged communication adapted to contemporary digital environments. Both parties articulate simplified moral narratives that oppose virtuous citizens to corrupt elites, while simultaneously presenting themselves as agents of renewal and national salvation. However, their ideological emphasis and symbolic repertoires differ significantly, reflecting distinct voter appeals.



“Sword” (MECH) positions itself as a pro-European yet national party centered on moral renewal, transparency, anti-corruption, and institutional reform. Its communication strategy emphasizes direct engagement with citizens, legal accountability, and democratic participation. This profile resonates particularly with younger, urban, and relatively educated voters who express dissatisfaction with traditional parties but maintain normative commitments to democratic principles. “Greatness” (Velichie), by contrast, relies heavily on national symbolism, historical narratives, and a vision of state strength and sovereignty. Its discourse draws on nostalgia, collective identity, and perceived external threats, attracting voters who feel socially, economically, or culturally marginalized.

Both parties extensively exploit digital platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, generate viral content, and construct an image of authenticity. This strategy mirrors broader European trends. In Italy, the Five Star Movement pioneered the use of blogs and social media to mobilize supporters through rapid, emotionally resonant messages. In France, political actors across the ideological spectrum, from Jean-Luc Mélenchon to Éric Zemmour, have used TikTok and YouTube to reach younger audiences through short, emotionally charged content. In Germany, the AfD’s rise on TikTok illustrates how far-right actors adapt to platform logics to maximize visibility and emotional engagement. These comparative examples demonstrate that the Bulgarian case fol-

lows a broader European pattern in which political communication increasingly prioritizes speed, spectacle, and affect.

The empirical component of the thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to ensure methodological triangulation and analytical depth. The quantitative strand consists of two survey studies with a total of 240 respondents, providing statistically relevant insights into voter attitudes, political preferences, and patterns of electoral behavior.

The qualitative component complements this dataset through semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis. A total of three in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the two political parties under examination, alongside fifteen individual interviews with voters. These interviews aimed to capture nuanced perspectives, motivations, and interpretations that cannot be fully explored through survey data alone.

The findings reveal widespread political distrust: the majority of respondents report feeling unrepresented by established parties and evaluate Bulgarian democracy as weak or dysfunctional. Similar attitudes have been documented across Europe, where dissatisfaction with representative institutions increasingly translates into support for anti-establishment alternatives.

Emotional factors emerge as central drivers of voting behavior. Fear, frustration, anger, nostalgia, and a desire for justice shape political preferences more strongly than programmatic considerations. Voters of both “Sword” and “Greatness” display



high emotional engagement, strong identification with party leaders, and relatively low analytical scrutiny of policy proposals. Leaders are perceived as authentic, courageous, and fundamentally different from conventional politicians, reflecting patterns observed in other European populist movements. The personalization of politics thus plays a key role, with leaders embodying the moral opposition to the status quo.

One of the thesis’s main contributions is the introduction of the concept of “fast politics.” Drawing an analogy with fast fashion and fast food, the concept captures a mode of political engagement characterized by rapid emotional gratification, symbolic immediacy, and short attention cycles. “Sword” and “Greatness” exemplify this model by offering easily

RESEARCH

consumable political content designed to resonate quickly rather than endure. Their appeal generates what the thesis terms “empty confidence”: a temporary sense of empowerment and novelty that satisfies voters momentarily but often lacks institutional depth. Fast politics is not merely a Bulgarian phenomenon but a broader European dynamic shaped by accelerated media consumption and platform logics. Unlike earlier forms of populism, which relied on long-term ideological consolidation, contemporary movements increasingly operate within an attention economy that rewards immediacy, emotional intensity, and virality. This dynamic facilitates rapid political ascents but also increases volatility, encouraging voters to continuously seek new alternatives once the initial emotional effect fades.

The research concludes that “Sword” (MECH) and “Greatness” (Velichie) successfully convert social discontent into rapid political gains through a combination of emotional appeal, symbolic narratives, and digital communication strategies. Their trajectory illustrates a shift “from populism to success,” demonstrating how fast politics can mobilize voters effectively in times of crisis. At the same time, the study highlights the fragile and potentially ephemeral nature of political movements built on speed, spectacle, and emotional immediacy rather than institutional consolidation. By situating the Bulgarian case within a comparative European context, the thesis contributes to broader debates on populism, political communication, and the future of democratic representation in accelerated societies.

In the era of fast politics, populism no longer seeks to patiently organize the people; it seeks to momentarily electrify them. What once functioned as a thin-centred ideology and a political style now operates as a rapid emotional transaction - transforming crisis into performance, identification into loyalty, and speed into a substitute for institutional depth.

New Bulgarian University, 2025

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Klinger, U. Koc-Michalska, K. “Populism as a Communication Phenomenon: A Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Comparison of Political Campaigns on Facebook,” *Mots. Les langages du politique*. 2025.

Le Bon, G. *Psychology of crowds*. 1895.

Moffitt, B. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, Stanford Scholarship Online, 2017.

Mudde, C., Kaltwasser, C. “Populism: A Very Short Introduction”, p. 19. 2017.

Mudde, C., Kaltwasser, C. *Populisms in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* New York, Cambridge University Press. 2013.

Noelle-Neumann, E. *The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion*. Lange Muller. 2001.

Staykova, E. Otova I. “Bulgarian Populisms in the New Millennium”. 2024.

Stutje, J.W. *Charismatic Leadership and Social Movements: The Revolutionary Power of Ordinary Men and Women*. 1st ed., Berghahn Books, 2012. JSTOR. Accessed September 4, 2025.

Tarragoni F. “The people according to Ernesto Laclau”: *Collège de France* 1530. 2017.

Weyland, K. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 1–22. 2001.

JOURNEY TO ERUA



Atif Yaseen (MRU)

Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.

– Mattie Stepanek

When I came to Lithuania to pursue my further studies, I actively sought opportunities that would allow me to explore my potential while sharing my knowledge with others. As a student of Economics at Mykolas Romeris University (MRU), Lithuania, I was eager to engage in activities beyond the classroom that aligned with my academic and personal interests.

One day, I came across an announcement on MRU's social media page about the Young Forum for Action on Climate Change in Las Palmas, Spain. I applied for the program and was fortunate to be accepted. This experience proved to be highly valuable, as it enhanced my understanding of climate change and provided a platform for meaningful discussions on global environmental challenges. At the forum, I also met Niki Kasis, who is responsible for ERUA's student engagement and introduced me to the mission and vision of the European Reform Alliance University (ERUA) and encouraged me to become actively involved.

After returning to Lithuania, I applied to become an ERUA ambassador, with the aim of contributing to ERUA initiatives within Mykolas Romeris University

as well as at the European level. This role offered me a unique opportunity to serve society, engage in collaborative academic activities, and contribute to addressing important social and global issues. As an ERUA ambassador, I participated in two additional programs: the Face of Justice intensive course at SWPS University in Poland and a Winter School in Greece. Both programs were closely related to my academic discipline and significantly enriched my academic perspective.

ERUA provided me with a platform to share my ideas, engage in discussions with professors, and transform theoretical knowledge into practical and meaningful outcomes. Moreover, through ERUA, I had the opportunity to connect with students from diverse regions and countries. These intercultural interactions were truly unique and possible because

of ERUA's inclusive and collaborative environment. Inspired by these experiences, I began learning Italian and Spanish, as my participation in ERUA programs deepened my interest in languages and cultures. I strongly believe that language and culture are essential tools for understanding the world from a global perspective.

ERUA has played a vital role in enhancing my public communication and teamwork skills, while also supporting my academic development. The experiences, connections, and opportunities provided by ERUA have had a lasting impact on my personal and professional growth.

FROM ERUA ALUMNI



Elena Georgieva (NBU Alumna)

My journey with the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA) has been nothing short of shaping. As Elena Georgieva, a journalism student from New Bulgarian University, I joined ERUA two years ago with the curiosity to explore how universities across Europe can work together to create meaningful connections. Little did I know that this experience would expand my view of what it means to be an engaged, globally-minded student.

Over the past two years, I saw how a small student initiative could connect classrooms in Sofia, Paris, and Frankfurt, and how our stories could spark conversations across borders. I had the privilege of representing NBU on the Student Board, where students from different countries gathered to exchange perspectives, debate ideas, and take real decisions that shaped ERUA initiatives.

I remember the meeting at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) in April 2024 vividly: sitting around a long table with students from all over Europe, we discussed strategies for increasing student engagement across the alliance. It was exciting to navigate diverse opinions, cultural backgrounds, and academic approaches.

One of my most memorable roles within ERUA was being part of the editorial team for the student magazine, Catch Up. Creating a magazine for an international audience was a whole different challenge. Our aim was centred

around curating stories that reflected the lives, interests, and voices of students from multiple countries. I learned to balance creativity with strategy - how to make content engaging while maintaining a coherent voice.

I'll never forget the excitement of brainstorming features with my teammates over Zoom, debating headlines, and finally seeing the issues published. There was something magical about knowing that students from Paris, Frankfurt (Oder), or Las Palmas could read our work and feel connected through it. Catch Up became a bridge, linking students across borders, a tangible expression of ERUA's mission to foster collaboration and exchange.

ERUA also opened doors to experiences I could never have imagined. The ERUA Manifesto Writing Workshop at x University in Saint Denis in October 2023 was an experience of a new kind. Together with students and faculty, we explored what ERUA stands for, debated ideas about education and society, and even co-created drafts that contributed to the alliance's ongoing discourse. It was inspiring to see young voices shaping an institutional vision.

Later, in May 2024, I participated in the traveling seminar "The Social Role of the Museum and Its Spaces," also at Paris 8 University. Walking through museum spaces, discussing their societal impact, and reflecting on the intersections of culture, politics, and community gave

ERUA EXPERIENCE

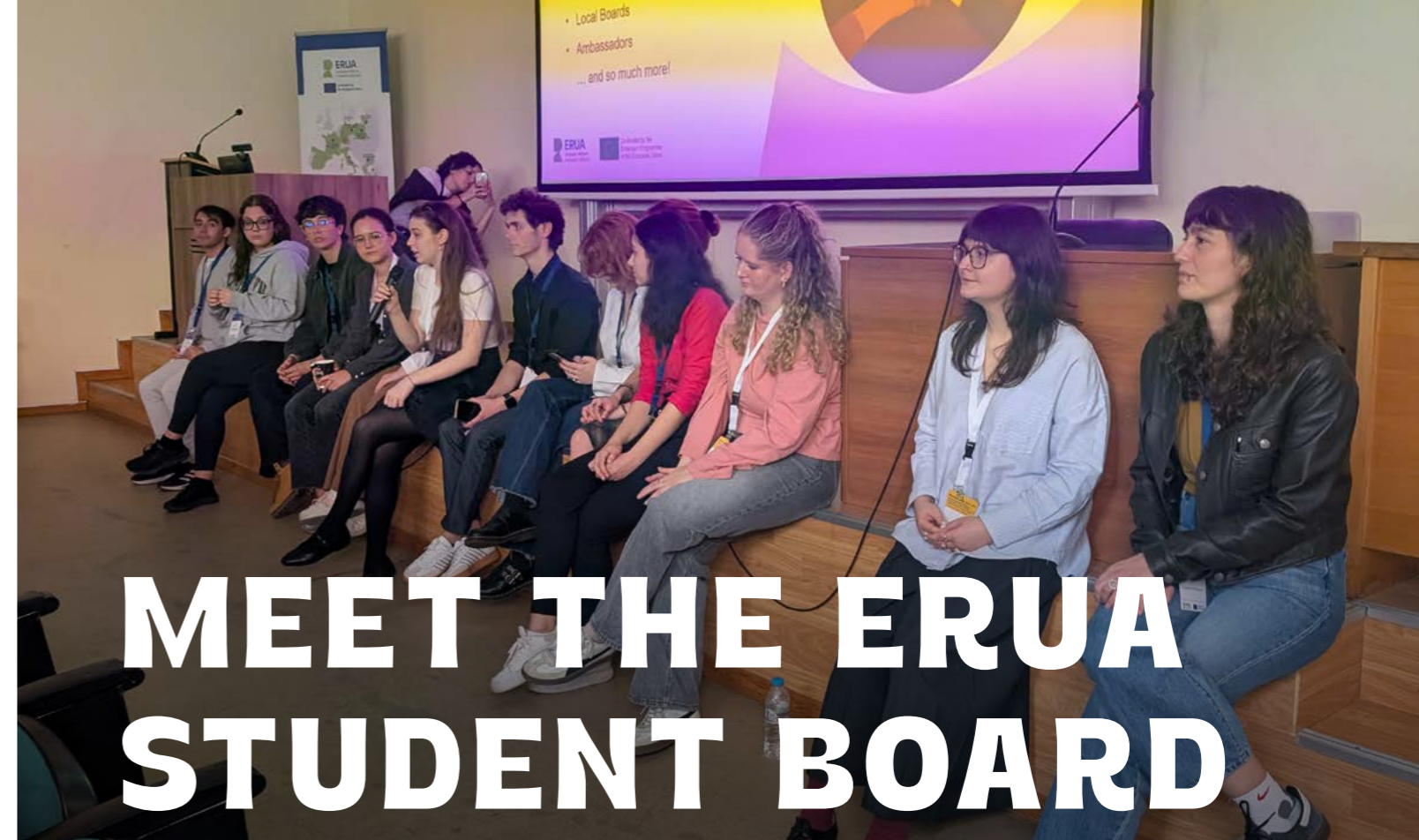
me a fresh perspective on the possibilities of creating meaningful relationships in an international environment.

The highlight of my ERUA journey was attending the 4th Annual Summit in 2024, themed “Social Innovations for a Transformative Society.” The summit was a whirlwind of workshops, panels, and networking events.

Looking back, ERUA has been more than a collection of meetings, workshops, and magazine articles. It has been a space to experiment and to reflect. I have learned that collaboration is messy but more often than not - necessary, some ideas are only as powerful as their

implementation, and initiatives like this are more than anything else about connecting, questioning, and transforming communities. I’ve met incredible peers, mentors, and friends who continue to inspire me, and I’ve discovered a sense of agency that I didn’t know I had.

For any student considering joining ERUA, I can only say: dive in. Be curious, be bold, and embrace the messiness of collaboration. There is a chance you will discover a version of yourself that is capable of thinking, acting, and connecting on not only national but on European scale.



Sofia Tsolova (NBU)

If you’ve ever heard “Student Board” in an ERUA meeting and thought, okay... but what do they actually do? You’re not alone. To keep it simple, we sat down with Alexandra Petrova (Student Board Secretary/Member, NBU) to talk about what the ERUA Student Board is, how it started, and how students can actually connect with it.

Sofia Tsolova: To start, how would you describe the Student Board to someone who has never heard of it? What is its core mission within the ERUA framework?

Alexandra Petrova: The Student Board consists of student representatives from all ERUA universities. Its main goal is to represent students by advocating for their interests and needs, supporting projects, organizing activities, and helping shape the ways students can

engage in the alliance. The Student Board also elects delegates to other bodies in ERUA where important decisions are made jointly.

ST: What is your specific position in the Student Board, and what do your responsibilities look like?

AP: I’m currently the Secretary of the Student Board. That means I take notes during our monthly meetings and support the preparation, especially by taking care of the agenda. I’m also involved in communication in different channels (especially email), although we do have a designated contact person who mainly handles communication.

ST: Was the Student Board part of ERUA from the beginning, or did students create it?

AP: It actually started as a student initiative after a seminar on student en-

STUDENT BOARD

agement that took place before the second phase of ERUA. Students from different universities came together in Roskilde and then once more in Konstanz to discuss and develop the framework for the Student Board. The concept was later finalized at an annual summit, supported, and implemented within the alliance.

ST: How did you become a member? And for students interested in joining, what does the pathway look like?

AP: I became a member at a very early stage and have continuously had the support of the local student community at New Bulgarian University. For students interested in joining, the process usually goes through joining the Local ERUA Board at their institution, and then being supported and voted for in elections at their home university, which are usually held once a year.

ST: ERUA is big. What is the easiest way for students to share ideas or concerns with the Student Board?

AP: I want to highlight our ERUA ambassadors. Students from each university serve as a point of contact for students interested in mobilities, projects, or anything else within ERUA. Their contacts and information can be found on the official ERUA website. Also, students can meet their university's Student

Board representatives and ambassadors at local events and through the ERUA Local Boards.

ST: What is one initiative you're excited about at the moment?

AP: There are many ongoing projects, so it's hard to pick just one. But among the exciting initiatives are strengthening connections with external networks, other alliances, and student organizations. We're also discussing concepts for handbooks aimed at supporting students in engagement and mobilities.

ST: Looking ahead, what do you hope the Student Board becomes as ERUA grows?

AP: We have many new members after elections across our universities in November and December, and I'm really happy to see new faces and inspiration in the team. We now have all institutions represented, and I'm looking forward to the new ideas and initiatives everyone brings. As ERUA continues to grow, I hope the Student Board will keep having a strong voice at the alliance and international level, and stay even more connected to local student communities. That's how we build the big ERUA family, through connections, friendships, and initiatives.

Now that you've met what the Student Board does, here are the people behind it. Each Student Board member represents the ERUA partner university they study at.



Alexandra Petrova

Secretary/Member;
NBU

Motto: "Seek and create meaningful opportunities for students from students!"



Michalina Lorych

Member;
EUV

Motto: "Understand more. Fear less. That's how we move forward"



Sofia Tsoleva

Member;
NBU

Motto: "Universities should be the engine of social progress and bold activism."



Bikash Thapa

Member;
EUV

Motto: "Together, we can."



Athanasia Orfanou

Moderator/Member;
UAEGEAN

Motto: "Because ERUA is stronger when students help steer it."



Egor Smirnov

Member;
UNIMC

Motto: "When in doubt: petta reddast (it will all work out)"



Evangelos Zaftis

Member;
UAEGEAN

Motto: "Making opportunities accessible to students."



Waqar Younas

Member;
UNIMC

Motto: "I'm proud to represent student voices and actively contribute to a more inclusive and participatory academic community."

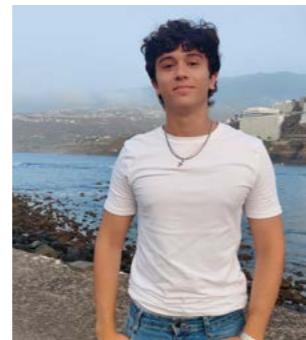
STUDENT BOARD



Clémentine Pourbaix

Member;
UP8

Motto: "We rise by supporting each other."



Javier Martín Rodríguez

Representative
to the Steering
Committee/Member;
ULPGC

Motto: "Seek and create meaningful opportunities for students from students!"



Julia Carvalho Bandeira

Representative
to the Steering
Committee/Member;
UP8

Motto: "Keeping student engagement practical and inclusive"



Izan Suárez Nuez

Member;
ULPGC

Motto: "Being a Student Board member means student representation, involvement, and teamwork"



Ekin Furuncu

Member;
MRU

Motto: "I believe education should be active, collaborative, and practice-oriented."



Selina Çiçek

Member;
MRU

Motto: "I want to actively represent students and contribute to improving our university community."

Substitute members are elected so they can step in and represent their university if a main member is not available.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS



Natali Todorova
NBU



Mark Lenkevič
MRU



Nicole Marut
EUV



Cristina Ventura
ULPGC



Zuzanna Siwinska

Representative
to the Steering
Committee/Member;
SWPS

Motto: "Turning student ideas into real action."



Julia Marczak

Member;
SWPS

Motto: "Helping students get involved, locally and internationally."

EDITORIAL TEAM

CONTENT CREATOR AND EDITOR:

Muhammad Ismail, EUV
email: ismail@europa-uni.de

Sofia Tsoлова, NBU
email: f116744@students.nbu.bg

Daniela Garcia, ULPGC
email: daniela.garcia108@alu.ulpgc.es

DESIGNER

Diana Venkova, NBU
email: dianasvenkova@gmail.com

ERUA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TEAM

email: erua-students@europa-uni.de

This magazine is a joint product of European Reform University Alliance (ERUA), represented by the Paris 8 University as the coordinating institution of ERUA.
email: erua.eui@univ-paris8.fr



The views and opinions expressed in this article/magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Catch-Up, its editors, or its publisher.

We gratefully acknowledge the following contributors and sources for the photographs used in this publication: ERUA (pages 6–22), Valeria Lazareva (page 26), ULPGC and UNIMC (page 27), Izan Suárez Nuez (pages 28–30), Matteo Musto (pages 40–43), Gabriela Pawłowicz (page 44), FOREU4ALL student-led community (pages 46–49), Ana Díaz Hernández (pages 50–55), Montserrat Maldonado Arévalo, Amanda Melián Santana, Esmeralda Padrón Santana, Astrid Santana Santana (pages 56–59), Sofia Tsołova (pages 60–61), ERUA (page 63), ERUA (page 89), and Heide Fest (page 95). Images used on page 72 were sourced from Pixabay and used under the Pixabay License. Images used on pages 76, 84, and 86 were sourced from Unsplash and used under the Unsplash License. Images used on pages 78, 80, and 81 were sourced from Freepik. Attribution: Designed by Freepik.

All author and editor portraits published in this magazine have been provided directly by the respective authors and editors from private sources.

Cover image: ERUA Student Ambassadors at the Summit in Lesbos.

Website: www.erua-eui.eu

Instagram: [we_are_erua](https://www.instagram.com/we_are_erua)

Facebook: [ERUA - European Reform University Alliance](https://www.facebook.com/ERUA-EuropeanReformUniversityAlliance)

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

BECOME A CONTRIBUTOR!



How To Become A Contributor

VISIT OUR WEBPAGE:

<https://erua-eui.eu/get-involved/as-a-student/student-engagement/erua-student-magazine/>

VIRTUAL OPPORTUNITIES

ONLINE MEETINGS TO DISCUSS
VARIOUS TOPICS AND SHARE
POINTS OF VIEW

*To meet and
study together*

DOES POVERTY
INFLUENCE OUR VIEWS?

HOW CAN WE HELP THE
PLANET OTHER THAN
RECYCLING?

DO WE HAVE PREJUDICE
ON JOB FLEXIBILITY?

HOW CAN WE BUILD A
STRONGER COMMUNITY?

Next session: 30/04/2026 at 14:00 EEST
Want more info? Email j.pennesi@unimc.it today!



Scan me

Zoom link

Queer Connect

Online Networking Round for Students & Initiatives
With short inputs, exchange & a safer space.

Next on Apr 22, May 20, Jun 17 at 1 p.m. CET
Hosted by European University Viadrina – Mail: marullrich@europa-uni.de