

Vision of a Future EUI

Three questions led our discussions on our aspirations and vision for the EUI: What does the EUI stand for? What is our purpose? What difference can we make in the world? The document outlining our response was developed in 2024 as a collaborative exercise involving the entire EUI community in interactive workshops, interviews and an online consultation. It has also solicited and benefited from input from various EUI governing bodies (Strategic Standing Committee, Research Council, Academic Council, Executive Committee).

Our history: advancing the European spirit

In 1972 – twenty-one years before the Maastricht treaty gave birth to the European Union we know today – continental leaders came together and formulated a revolutionary idea: a European research university. The goal, as described in the EUI Convention, was to create:

- “An Institute contributing to the development of the cultural and scientific heritage of Europe. This aim shall be pursued through teaching and research at the highest university level as well as developing interdisciplinary research programmes on the major issues confronting contemporary European society.”
- “A forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas and experience.”

Education, interdisciplinary research, and public engagement around issues that challenge European societies have been the pillars of the EUI from the outset. Over the years of its existence, the Institute has lived up to this mission of advancing the European spirit.

The EUI, unlike other universities, is not embedded in a specific national culture, but is *truly* European, and this accounts for its success. **The Institute already was Europe, while Europe was still under construction.** Our community includes people from all over the continent, and increasingly from across the world. It is living testimony to multinationalism, mutual learning and bridging barriers previous generations thought worth fighting for. The EUI has contributed to the public conversation about Europe, trained political, civic and cultural leaders, and been home to intellectuals with a strong public voice and the courage to speak out.

Times have changed. Several universities have become European, hosting students and faculty from European countries and beyond. These universities resemble us, they are our partners and friends. The notion of Europe has changed too. The very idea of Europe and deeper European integration is increasingly scrutinised from different perspectives.

This forces us to reckon with a simple truth: what once distinguished us as a cutting-edge European university has now become unexceptional. Ours is **a legacy worth preserving, but this is not sufficient if the EUI is to be a beacon for the future.**

Challenges to society

Europe has been built upon democracy, freedom, peace and reconciliation, transnational governance, economic integration, and social development around a consensual model of society. Little is now left of the structural stability of the political forces upon which this was premised. The institutions of the European Union, but also the principles that underwrite the Union, are being questioned and have lost their allure for many citizens while nationalism and authoritarianism are on the rise.

The issues Europe and the world face today are myriad and well known: war, climate change and the loss of biodiversity, shifting geopolitical constellations, declining prosperity, security concerns, human rights, migration, the rapid advancement of digital technologies, and the crisis of democracy itself. These **challenges are not isolated, they are interconnected** and global. They are also – or they should be – **opportunities to create more equitable and sustainable futures** if we manage them well.

As yet we seem unable to imagine Europe's future and the direction of social transformation beyond setting technical fixes for discrete challenges. Addressing the challenge requires transnational cooperation and innovative models for generating public value. This calls for much **closer collaboration between politics, administration, academia, civil society, business, and citizens**. It also requires moving beyond technical "solutionism".

What does this mean for us as a European university?

A university such as ours cannot be confined to delivering technical or policy solutions to issues that are considered from a largely implicit, taken-for-granted background. The optimism of the 1990s about the end of history, where liberal democracy and market-driven economies prevail, has vanished. Today, **we must be bold and reclaim the capacity to question the most basic assumptions** about the way of life, the collective choices, and the political and economic systems of European societies. We must not be afraid to expand our intellectual horizons.

In the face of shifting geopolitical realities, such as rising tensions between China and the USA and the return of war in Europe, the need to debate and **imagine Europe's possible pathways forward** is more urgent than ever. Europe's founders were bold and imaginative: read today, the *Manifesto di Ventotene* is striking in its utopian drive. Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi took stock of "the crisis of European civilisation" to outline an inspiring and transformative vision of social justice on a continental scale.

Ideas about Europe's future need to be informed by its history as well as being forward- and outward-looking. We need to ask legitimate questions about Europe's past and present role in the world: Has the continent lived up to its values and its global responsibility? What are the tensions between Europe's ethical and normative ambitions and its colonial debt?

In recent years, European studies have moved between the extremes of technical specialisation in the area of European integration and a tendency to "globalise" Europe along postcolonial lines. The capacity to imagine an equitable and sustainable European future has often been lost somewhere between these poles. Thinking about Europe's place in the world *does* mean taking into account broader perspectives, and in particular those that express a strong demand not for less, but for more Europe. For many young people from the Western Balkans, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Afghanistan,

or Sudan, Europe is the future. We cannot fail to meet these aspirations. At this historic moment, our continent needs – more than ever before in its history – **a place of reflection, research, and exploration to tackle existential questions.**

Challenges to the social sciences and humanities

Education and research are facing profound challenges. The rise of AI-based knowledge generation is reshaping academia and raises fundamental questions about the **role of human expertise** in a world dominated by algorithms and data-driven insights. Simultaneously, we are witnessing a crisis of expertise as the line between facts and misinformation becomes increasingly blurred. Exacerbated by the proliferation of new media platforms, this shift has dramatically altered the way public opinion is formed.

Academic institutions are also facing growing **pressures on academic freedom.** Public universities continue to experience austerity, while corporate and political influence on research is increasing, which raises concerns about potential double standards and the complicity of academic institutions in serving interests that may not align with the public good. These trends bring to the fore critical debates about the social and political responsibilities of universities, highlighted most recently by the complex discussions surrounding the conflict in Gaza.

Lastly, the **gap between universities and the world** they seek to understand is widening. This is partly due to specialisation and fragmentation into sub-disciplines coupled with the discontinuity between the length of the academic project cycle and the rapid pace of technological, social, and political change, driven by news cycles and decision-making processes. All too often the social sciences and humanities risk being overtaken by the very phenomena they aim to study.

Universities do not have a monopoly on knowledge production, but they do enable the **exercise of reflexivity**: not just to think about the world, but also to critically examine *how* we think about it. One of the most important resources universities should provide is time: the time to step back from the world, which is essential in developing wisdom about how to act in it, and to escape the constant, reactive jet stream of commentary fuelled by digital technologies and social media. At a moment when we are bombarded with information, the ability to make sense of it is more pressing than ever.

Where does the EUI stand?

Over time, the EUI has successfully **built the pillars on which our future will stand.** It has developed a division of labour that has, so far, served us well. The four core departments lead the way in foundational research in sociology and political science, law, history, and economics. The Robert Schuman Centre has become a true hub connecting scientific analysis and the policy world. The Florence School of Transnational Governance is claiming its rightful place at the apex of European education and executive training.

The **EUI professional staff** have created a healthy, supportive, and inclusive work environment and are integral to our contribution to society. Staff members provide vital core functions such as tools for data-based knowledge generation, facilitating internal and external collaboration, furthering the broader dissemination of knowledge, and fostering academic excellence and sustainability at our

Institute. This enables all members of our community to thrive in their contribution to our core mission: to reflect, to research and write, to teach and train, to exchange and debate ideas.

Just like in architecture, **pillars cannot stand alone**; they must work together to uphold the **common roof** formed by the mission, vision and purpose of our Institute. We must fully exploit the potential for collaboration between the six academic units and the EUI services and aspire to move beyond our traditional disciplinary set-up. This will enhance our engagement in public debates and our profile as *one EUI*; strengthen our synergies and reduce a bureaucracy that has grown over decades; find ethically sustainable ways to secure our funding for the long term.

The EUI's **double identity as a research university and an intergovernmental organisation** is both a significant responsibility and an asset for us. We have from the start embraced the values of the European Union, including freedom, democracy, equality, and the respect for human rights. We will continuously strive to reflect and defend these values internally and externally. As an intergovernmental organisation the EUI is able to interact closely with individuals and institutions at all political levels, contributing to reimagining the European idea and to rebuilding trust.

In collaborating with member states and regional actors we contribute to the capacity of European institutions for bottom-up learning. This helps ensure that EU law-making is informed by the views of impacted constituencies and thus implemented more effectively. In this way, we support political institutions as they evolve and seek to modernise in order to deliver better policies.

The seeds for the future EUI have already been planted. The uniqueness of our community is one of its strongest assets. We intend to nurture it further, actively including our Alumni. We strive to make the EUI an inclusive institution, giving space to a diversity of voices. We are united in our commitment to the betterment of societies.

Three dimensions of a future EUI

The framework for the future development of the EUI and all its units is organized around three major dimensions, which orient our daily work and guide our efforts to fully realise our potential.

The first dimension is about how we perform our core tasks: excellence in research, teaching, and training.

The EUI is a source of academic knowledge and topical excellence. It provides **orientation for institutions and societies at large**. In times of uncertainty, the crucial role of the social sciences and humanities is to deliver solid interpretations of knowledge and cultivate collective sense-making. We critically challenge short-sighted and ill-informed solutions, anticipate and shape tomorrow's debates and policies, and support the development of long-term alternative scenarios for a just and sustainable future.

Our work is driven by a strong ethos rooted in a desire to **contribute to what is relevant to our lives and to future generations**. We focus not only on political institutions and the economy, but on well-being, justice, fairness, solidarity, and equity. We embrace our mission to **boldly rethink and deepen the European project**, its values, its ambition, and its political and social fabric. We proactively envision long-term futures: How can we transform our societies towards more sustainable and

equitable models? How can we manage this transformation in a way that is socially and economically viable? We assume Europe's responsibility within and towards the world, drawing on extra-European perspectives as a mirror to critically reflect on ourselves.

We do this by outlining jointly defined **transversal themes** that address complex, interconnected challenges. Interdisciplinary approaches nurture our research, our teaching and training, and our engagement with the world. Research, teaching and training at the EUI do not have to be confined to these themes, but they allow us to **gain visibility**, set up hubs that bring our academic units closer together and broaden our horizon beyond the EUI's traditional disciplines.

The **research** undertaken by faculty, scholars, and researchers remains the foundation of this collaboration, **our cornerstone and our raison d'être**. Early stage researchers have a sharpened sense of the emerging questions of our times and should be given a greater role in defining intellectual agendas. We enable them to carry out their work effectively without being impeded by financial hardship. We give non-elitist access to our programmes and establish a community of scholars that is more just, diverse, and inclusive.

Teaching and training are no less important. We enable future academics, teachers, leaders, professionals, or activists to shape the future in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world. We equip them not just with knowledge but also with the critical thinking, skills and adaptability required to navigate ongoing transformations. To deliver this, we explore new formats to enrich our teaching and training offerings and to enhance the EUI's learning environment.

The EUI's common goal is to **expand our understanding of today's world** and sharpen the perception of the future. This means staying with the question as much as needed rather than searching for quick and easy answers. It means cultivating courage within the entire community, empowering faculty, researchers, students, and professionals to challenge conventional wisdom, take bold steps in their work, and explore new ways of achieving meaningful change.

The second dimension is about how we engage with the world and co-create knowledge.

We open up the EUI to **external actors as co-creators of knowledge and ideas** that continuously enrich our thinking and learning. **EUI Innovation Labs** address transversal themes and foster collaboration across units and disciplines, potentially including social and political actors. The Labs operate in a flexible and agile way, providing reflective spaces to think and act on complex challenges and generate innovative models for creating public value.

Co-creation does not happen by itself. It needs to be designed and constantly nurtured throughout the whole collaborative process, from clarifying the issues to be addressed, to designing and facilitating the communicative interactions, to follow-up activities. To this end, a **facilitation team** will provide advice and practical assistance, based on experience in collaborative governance, leadership, and research. This allows us to use our human resources and our knowledge more effectively across the entire Institute.

We strive to be a leading European hub for the co-creation of sustainable models of society. We reinforce our role as an open and **reflexive community at the critical intersection of academia, politics, and society**, bringing together worlds that are too often separate.

The third dimension is about how we communicate our work beyond the confines of academia.

Sharing our research includes but extends beyond highly ranked academic publications. Writing for the top journals and attending academic conferences is important, but it is not enough. Our work should **resonate beyond the confines of academia** without losing its depth.

This translates into faculty, scholars, and researchers raising their voices in public. We actively tap into the potential offered by (traditional and new) media to enhance our impact, without compromising our intellectual rigour. We embrace the formation of alliances with media outlets and explore new formats for public conversations that go beyond words and texts. This involves voices from all parts of society, including activists and artists from multiple geographies.

We continue to develop long-term intellectual agendas while engaging more fully in public discussions. **We go to the broader public and bring the broader public in.**

Conclusion

The EUI is a university like no other. Our history and specific multinational set-up enable us to develop a truly European spirit, produce excellent research, nourish outstanding academics, and train influential leaders in politics, business, and civil society. We must be vigilant and remain a place for a transformative experience, fostering an environment where innovation and a commitment to the public good are paramount.

This entails new ways of using technologies. We address the challenges *and* the opportunities of AI-based knowledge production, teaching, and administration. We harness data-based technologies to advance our mission and critically reflect on how they serve the needs of societies.

It also means cultivating courage within our community, empowering our faculty, researchers, students, and services to challenge conventional wisdom, take bold steps in their work, and pioneer new approaches that lead to meaningful change.

Many other universities share the challenges we face, and no university will find the solutions alone. Not all new pathways we embark on will be successful and we will learn from our mistakes. The real risk is to carry on with business as usual. By daring to be curious, open and bold, the EUI **explores new formats for creating public value** and continues to be an **inspirational model for research and education**, laying the cornerstone for the future of the social sciences and humanities.