

FORTHEM Policy Dialogue



From Collaboration to Competitiveness?

UNIVERSITIES IN THE CHANGING EUROPEAN FUNDING LANDSCAPE

15/9/26



ONLINE EVENT



SIGN UP BY
11 September 2026

Online Event jointly organized by the FORTHEM Alliance, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz,
and the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the European Union in Brussels

September 15, 2026

9:30 – 13:00 CET



Join the conversation. Register today:

[From Collaboration to Competitiveness? Universities in the Changing European Funding Landscape](#)

Why This Discussion Matters - Now More Than Ever

[FORTHEM Alliance](#) includes universities that are deeply rooted in their regional innovation ecosystems while working closely together as a European University Alliance. Except for University of Latvia in Riga, all partner universities are located outside their respective national capitals and have long-standing connections with regional authorities, research organizations, innovation agencies, and industry.

At the same time, FORTHEM connects universities with diverse levels of experience in European research funding. The Alliance brings together institutions with a well-established record in Horizon Europe and other EU programmes with partner universities that are nationally strong and now further expand their engagement in European collaborative research.

While the European Universities Initiative is primarily funded through Erasmus+, with a strong focus on education, mobility, and institutional transformation, FORTHEM has deliberately built a strong research and innovation dimension. The Alliance creates [opportunities for researchers](#), research support professionals, regional authorities and other stakeholders to exchange ideas, identify common interests and develop joint European research projects.

This objective has become even more relevant considering the discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The proposed closer connection between Horizon Europe and the future European Competitiveness Fund places greater emphasis on competitiveness, industrial priorities, and higher technology readiness levels. While this opens new opportunities, it also raises the question of how university-led collaborative research can remain visible, relevant, and fundable in the future European funding landscape.

Against this background, the event will explore how FORTHEM, other European University Alliances and the higher education sector more broadly can find a meaningful place in this evolving scenario.

The event aims to send a clear message: Europe's future competitiveness depends not only on market-oriented innovation, but also on strong universities, excellent research environments, and transnational academic cooperation. University-led research creates the knowledge base, critical expertise, and talent pipelines on which innovation depends. Future European funding instruments must therefore recognize and support the essential role of universities and European University Alliances in connecting education, research, and innovation, addressing societal challenges across borders and disciplines, and strengthening Europe's long-term research and innovation capacity.

Agenda

Moderated by **Klaas de Boer**, *Representative of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the European Union in Brussels.*

** specific titles of the talks of the external speakers t.b.c. at later stage*

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| 9:30 – 10:00 | Welcome and Keynote |
| | Stefan Müller-Stach , Vice president for Research and Academic Careers at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz |
| | <i>Universities at the Heart of Europe's Competitiveness</i>
<i>Building Knowledge, Talent, and Resilience for the Future</i> |
| 10:00 – 10:30 | Claudia Siegel , Policy Officer and Seconded National Expert, Common Strategic Planning & Programming Service, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission. Siegel engages in the preparations for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. |
| 10:30 – 11:00 | Jimmy Bruun Felthaus , Minister Counsellor for Research and Innovation at the Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU. During the Danish EU Presidency, he led the first Council negotiations on the next Horizon Europe programme (2028–2034). |
| 11:00 – 11:15 | Break |
| 11:15 – 11:45 | Maria Mecenero , Policy Officer, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission. Mecenero works on the European Research Area (ERA), with a focus on strengthening the links between research, innovation, and higher education. |
| 11:45 – 12:15 | Thomas Estermann , Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development, European University Association (EUA). His work focuses on university funding, governance, and public policy across European higher education. |
| 12:15 – 12:45 | Doris Alexander (invited) , Associate Director for European Engagement, Trinity College Dublin; Co-Director of CHARM-EU; Chair of the FOR-EU4ALL Research & Innovation Topical Group. |
| 12:45 – 13:00 | Closing Reflections |