



## **Briefing for executives and experts**

**UnLiON Annual event: 19 November 2026**

**09.00-19.00, Brussels**

**From 19.00 Celebration**

### **What is UnLiON?**

UnLiON, the [Universities Informal Liaison Offices Network](#), is an informal network of 60 Brussels-based university liaison offices representing more than 170 excellent universities in 22 countries of the European Union as well as Norway, the United Kingdom, Japan, Switzerland and South Africa. The network acts as an arena of exchange where members share information, nurture collaboration and act as information multipliers. In Brussels, UnLiON regularly organises events in an attempt to raise topical issues relevant to the wider education, research, and innovation community with the aim of supporting the connection of our universities to the European sphere.

### **The annual event**

On Thursday 19 November 2026, from 9:30 to 19:00, UnLiON's annual event will be held

in Brussels. The annual event serves two main purposes: i) positioning UnLiON and its members as a pro-active actor in the European higher education sector, and ii) giving a platform for UnLiON member universities to establish a dialogue with EU policy-makers on topics relevant to the network.

This year will be a special year for UnLiON! We are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the network and for this occasion we have prepared a festive edition for you! Please check out the agenda of the day below. We hope you can join us in Brussels to celebrate together!

## Programme outline, timing

### Morning (for UnLiON members only)

| 9:00 – 9:30                                                                         | 9:30-10 :00                                                                                                  | 10:00 – 12:00                                                           | 12:00–12:30             | 12:30 – 14:00     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Arrival & coffee<br>ULB/VUB<br>(Boulevard Général Jacques 210, Building AC, B-1050) | Expert session (Panel discussion+site visit)<br>ULB/VUB (Boulevard Général Jacques 210, Building AC, B-1050) |                                                                         | Transfer to<br>CLARIDGE | Lunch<br>CLARIDGE |
|                                                                                     | Arrival & registration<br>European Parliament's INFO HUB                                                     | High-level Dialogue (invitation only)<br>European Parliament's INFO HUB | Walking to<br>CLARIDGE  |                   |

### Afternoon (open to external audiences)

| Time  | Agenda item                                                        | Venue    |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 14:00 | Registration and coffee for public conference                      | CLARIDGE |
| 14:30 | Public conference                                                  |          |
| 17:30 | Networking reception (Testimonials, artistic performances, awards) |          |
| 19:00 | Charity concert and celebration                                    |          |
| 22:00 | End of conference                                                  |          |

## 09:00-12:00 Expert session

### Creativity as Europe's Competitive Strength for Innovation

The Expert session will focus on the pivotal role of arts, design and creativity as a cross-cutting enabler to user-driven and open innovation. We will look at creativity as well as Cultural Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) as key contributors to resolving Europe's societal and technological challenges via advancing research, innovation, design thinking and innovative educational methods. Drawing on insights from our researchers and experts, we will gain a deeper understanding of how creative skills, often developed through sustainable collaboration frameworks with CCSI, are applied to design technological innovations, approaches and new training models. The session will foster the exchange of good practices between our member universities, develop new cooperation links and inspire new ideas. The curated set of examples on the panel will showcase to European Commission officials in attendance how our universities excel in implementing key strategies, such as the ERA Act and the Competitiveness Compass.

Venue: Usquare ULB/VUB (Boulevard Général Jacques 210, Building AC, B-1050) is an interdisciplinary campus dedicated to research, education and innovation.

#### *Proposed programme*

|       |                               |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| 9:00  | Welcome coffee                |
| 9:30  | Panel discussion with experts |
| 10:45 | Break                         |
| 11:00 | Site visit at ULB/VUB*        |
| 12:00 | End of Expert session         |

\*Site visit: **FabLab ULB** is an interdisciplinary university lab that brings together people and digital tools to collaboratively design, prototype and innovate through hands-on experimentation. In addition, we will exchange with a **Brussels-based CCIS company** (name tbc) that collaborates with ULB, on what creativity-driven innovation looks like from a company perspective.

Contact person: Anett Ruszanov, Greater Birmingham&West Midlands Brussels Office ([anett.ruszanov@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:anett.ruszanov@birmingham.gov.uk))

## 09:30-12:00 High-level dialogue FP10/ECF

### High-Level Dialogue between Members of the European Parliament and University Rectors: The Future of European R&I Policy and Competitiveness

**Participants:** university leadership, Rector, Vice-Rector or Pro Rector(or equivalent) and their accompanying UnLiON Brussels representatives up to 70 participants

Hosted by Eszter Lakos MEP (EPP) this **high-level dialogue** will bring together 6 Members of European Parliament: Parliament [Eszter Lakos \(EPP\)](#) , [Lina Galvez \(S&D\)](#), [Christian Ehler \(EPP\)](#), [Ivar Ljabs \(Renew\)](#), [René Repasi \(S&D\)](#), [Villa Ninisto \(Greens/EFA\)](#) and university rectors, vice rectors and MEPs on upcoming European R&I policy and funding landscapes.

The session aims to:

- Engage rectors with MEPs at this critical moment in the European policy cycle
- Reflect collectively on how FP10 and ECF proposals align with the missions, capacities, and long-term strategies of European universities, and covering R&I policy issues such as dual use, academic freedom, security and sovereignty
- Foster an open, active, and constructive dialogue, encouraging rectors to exchange experiences, concerns, and strategic priorities in a trusted environment.

#### *Proposed programme*

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 09:30                                                                                                   | Arrival and registration                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Session 1: Main priorities and challenges for R&amp;I Policy in Europe under the new MFF and ERA</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 10:00                                                                                                   | Welcome Chair of UnLiON                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 10:03                                                                                                   | Keynote speech, Eszter Lakos MEP covering European Research Area, FP10 and dual use                                                                                                                                    |
| 10:20                                                                                                   | Discussion with Eszter Lakos MEP, René Repasi MEP and Villa Ninisto MEP<br>Tour de table with UnLiON member university Rectors, moderator: Professor Birgitta Bergvall-Kåreborn, Rector Luleå University of Technology |
| 10:55                                                                                                   | Concluding remarks: Eszter Lakos MEP                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11:00                           | End of session 1                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Session 2 : FP10 and ECF</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 11:00                           | Opening by Christian Ehler MEP                                                                                                                                                        |
| 11:15                           | Discussion with Lina Galvez MEP and Ivars Ijabs MEP<br>Tour de table with UniLiON member university Rectors, moderator: Professor H       Boulanger, Rector of University de Lorraine |
| 11:55                           | Closing remarks by Christian Ehler MEP and Eszter Lakos MEP                                                                                                                           |
| 12:00                           | End of High-level Dialogue                                                                                                                                                            |

Contact person: Orsolya Lugmayer, E  tv  s Lor  nd University - Corvinus University of Budapest ([lugmayero@inf.elte.hu](mailto:lugmayero@inf.elte.hu))

## 14:30-17:30 Public conference

### Universities as Engines of Place-Based Innovation

High-level executives from UniLiON member universities, European policymakers, and industry representatives will convene to showcase how universities act as key drivers of place-based research & innovation ecosystems, skills development, and more broadly, how they contribute to Europe's competitiveness and impact alongside the four policy windows of the next Horizon Europe as well as the ECF.

Particular attention will be given to the wide range of instruments available to universities including strong partnerships and cooperation with industry, access to cutting-edge research and technology infrastructures, guidance by expert groups, university alliances and many others. Speakers will also be invited to outline their needs and present their vision for tackling competitiveness challenges in future programme planning and implementation.

#### *Proposed programme*

|       |                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 14:30 | Opening by UniLiON Chair                                                                                                                                    |
| 14:35 | Presentation from the Experts Session                                                                                                                       |
| 14:40 | <b>Opening Keynote:</b> Henna Virkkunen, EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT (2024-2029), Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, (tbc)                              |
| 15:10 | <b>Keynote:</b> The stakes of the ERA Act and the role of universities to contribute to ERA and innovation by <b>Jean David Malo</b> , European Commission, |

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                               | Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Simplification & Financial Instruments (RTD.PA02)                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Q&amp;A, interaction with the audience</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 16:00                                         | <b>Panel discussion</b> with speakers from European Commission DG GROW, DG CLIMA, UnLiON member university rector<br>Sophie Gabut, Safran<br>Eleonor Hedström, Director of Wärtsilä Next Business Lab and head of Innovation, Wärtsilä |
| 17:10                                         | <b>Closing Keynote</b> by Lithuanian Presidency Keynote speech by Tadas Tumenas/Birgita Serafinaviciute (TBC)                                                                                                                          |
| 17:25                                         | <b>Closing remarks</b> by the Chair of UnLiON                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 17:30                                         | End of Public Conference                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Contact person: Eric Foucher, University of Lorraine ([eric.foucher@univ-lorraine.fr](mailto:eric.foucher@univ-lorraine.fr))

## 17:30 - 19:00 Networking Reception

During the festive networking reception we will feature testimonial videos reflecting on the history of the network, artistic performances from our member universities and an awards ceremony recognising outstanding achievements.

## 19:00 - 22:00 Celebration Charity Concert

Celebration of UnLiON 10th Anniversary with live music.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Venue:** Claridge Chau. de Louvain 24, 1210 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode

### Contact person:

Evelina Brännvall

Head of European Office

Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

[evelina.brannvall@ltu.se](mailto:evelina.brannvall@ltu.se)