

FORTHEM

NEWSLETTER #2

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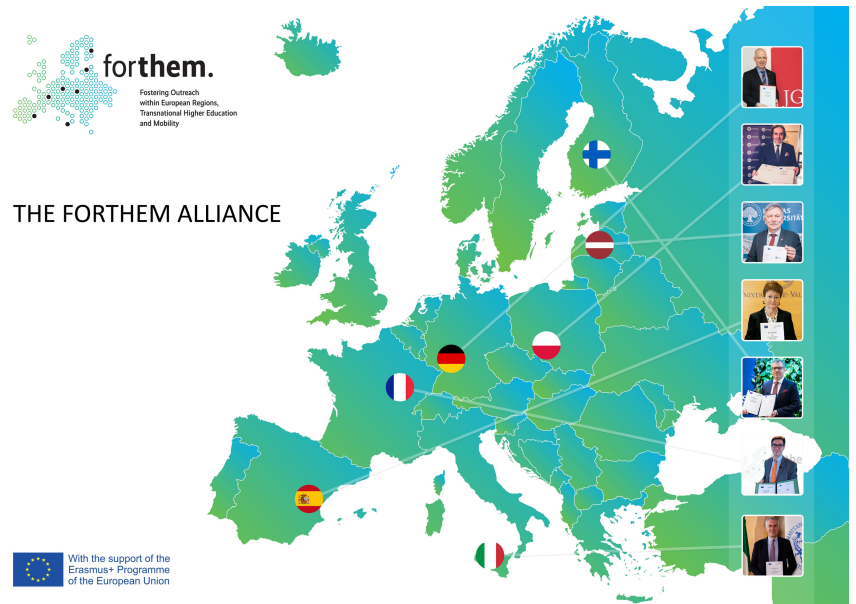


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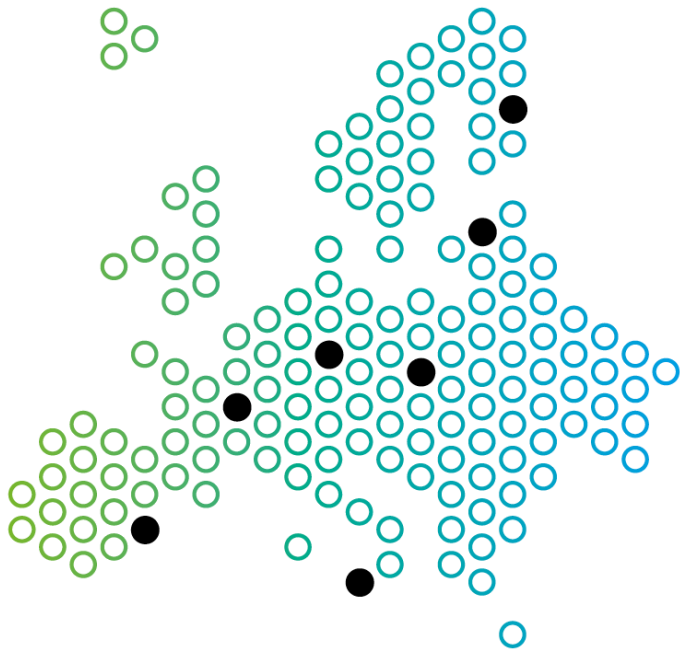
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agreement



Statute Signing Ceremony

On 25 January 2021 Heads of the FORTHEM Alliance partner universities signed the Statute of the FORTHEM Alliance.

On 25 January 2021 Heads of seven FORTHEM Alliance partner universities gathered online to sign the FORTHEM Alliance Statute and discuss the biggest challenges of the Alliance. The meeting was opened by professor Georg Krausch, President of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, who welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda of the ceremony. After that, the Heads of the partner universities exchanged greetings and statements on the importance of the FORTHEM Alliance plans and activities for their universities. As one of the main FORTHEM objectives is multilingualism, this part of the meeting took place in seven national languages.



Professor Georg Krausch, President of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, started this round with the following words, “Warm greetings from Germany. Together with its partners, Johannes Gutenberg University has founded the FORTHEM Alliance with the aim to deepen long-standing partnerships and to establish new ones. FORTHEM promotes cross-border education - especially 'For Them', for the students, for the generation that will shape the future of Europe. FORTHEM students will be able to design their own curriculum by selecting courses offered by the seven partner universities - to live in Poland for a while, take online courses from Dijon, do an internship in Finland, learn Italian in Sicily, start a volunteer project in Germany, make friends in Riga and find their first job in

Valencia. FORTHEM also means building a network for researchers and other university staff, including offers ranging from casual exchanges to international expert conferences. Through the promotion and expansion of mobility measures, innovation and research, we intend to ensure the transfer of knowledge to society”.

Professor Fabrizio Micari, Rector of the University of Palermo, continued, “Greetings from the University of Palermo! It is our belief that today, more than ever, students need a university experience that can prepare them for the world of work and give the opportunity to acquire specific skills. This is also why we fully support FORTHEM, which promotes innovative forms of teaching and learning through digital platforms, virtual mobility and language exchanges. The Digital Academy, lead by Unipa and, in general, the process of digitalization of skills pursued by FORTHEM, will allow us to share the educational excellence of European universities for the benefit of all the students of the consortium. We support Europe and we trust initiatives such as the FORTHEM Alliance could grow and develop the idea of Europe.”

Professor Vincent Thomas, President of the University of Burgundy, said, “Dear Rectors, dear colleagues. It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to meet you today for this signing ceremony. We are very proud, at University of Burgundy, to be coordinating one of the main missions of the alliance: student and staff mobility. Our close collaboration within FORTHEM allows us to move ever further forward in developing innovative forms of mobility and collaboration, whether they are physical, virtual or hybrid. The pandemic has not simplified our task, but we are in the process of setting up a virtual European campus uniting our seven universities. Nevertheless, all of us are very keen to return to physical mobility as soon as possible. For this reason, I am very much looking forward to welcoming your colleagues and students to Burgundy for the first FORTHEM campus in autumn 2021, around the theme “Food and Fooding”.

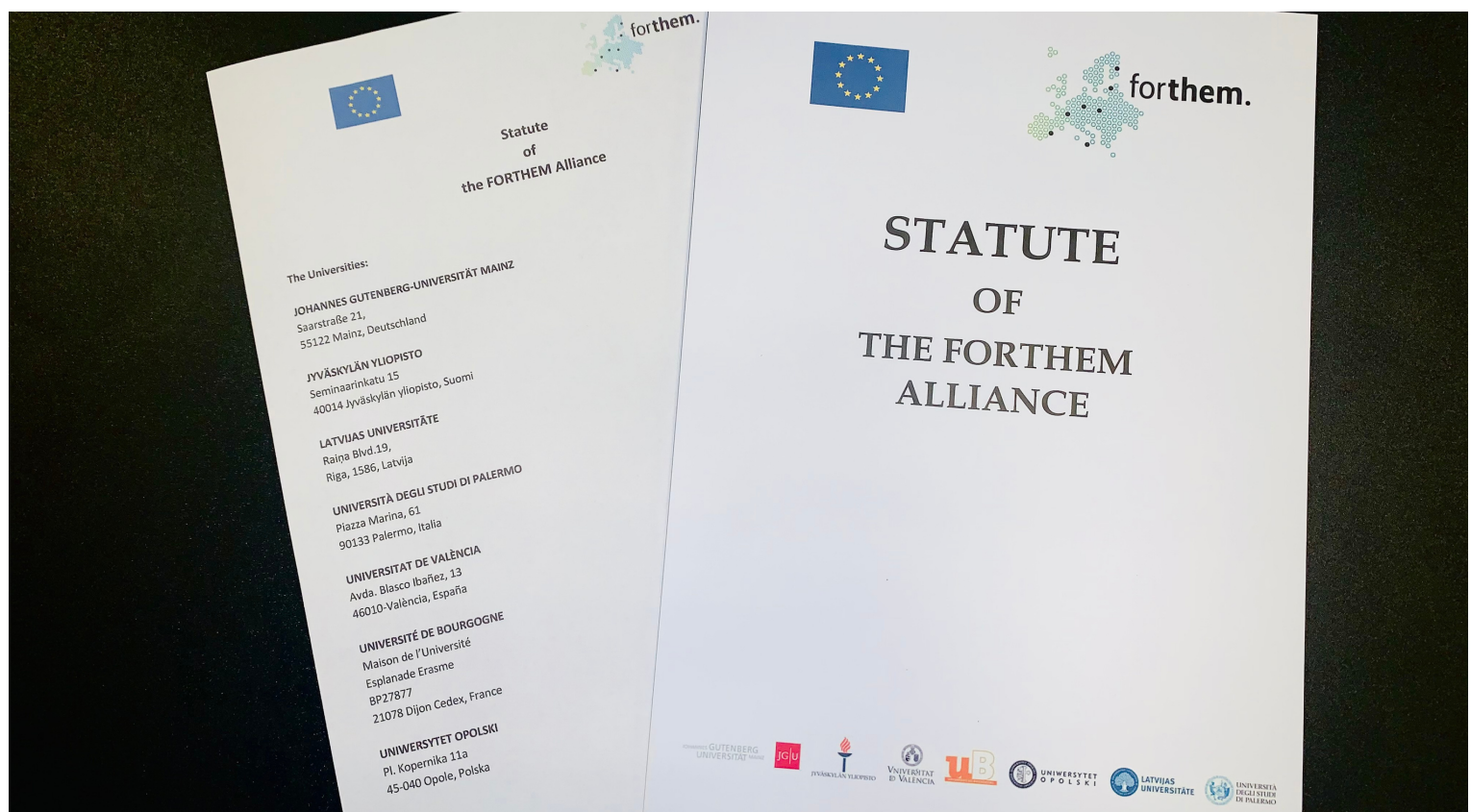
Professor Keijo Hämäläinen, Rector of the University of Jyväskylä, addressed the audience, “Greetings from Jyväskylä! JYU vision is to be a reformer of a knowledge-based and sustainable society. We are also a regional motor of internationalisation and innovation. Being part of FORTHEM Alliance will help us realize this vision. The most complex societal challenges cannot be solved by one research field or one university. They require interdisciplinary and multi-actor international collaboration. Acknowledging this, FORTHEM Labs bring together researchers and students from all seven universities as well as public and private sector representatives to analyse and to propose research-based solutions to current societal challenges. The University of Jyväskylä is proud to coordinate FORTHEM Lab activities, which combine the three main missions of a university, namely; research, education and societal interaction. Interdisciplinarity, involving students in the research activities already in the early stage of studies, and dialogue with stakeholders are priorities both for the University of Jyväskylä and for the FORTHEM Alliance.”

Professor Maria Vicenta Mestre Escrivà, Rector of the University of Valencia, said, "Dear colleagues, partners and friends! From the University of Valencia, an institution with more than five hundred years of history, we are glad to share with you this historic moment: the signing of the FORTHEM Statute, after a year and a half of intense work and more than three years of effort after the very initial idea. The University of Valencia coordinates FORTHEM's outreach and society mission. Together with teaching and research, this third mission is no less important: to transfer to the society not only knowledge, but also the critical spirit, value-based training and social engagement, values that define the spirit of the University of Valencia and are shared with FORTHEM."

Professor Marek Masnyk, Rector of the University of Opole, greeted the audience, "Good morning; on behalf of the University of Opole, I cordially greet all the Rectors and Presidents and convey to them, as well as to their academic colleagues and relatives, my best New Year's wishes. I also extend the greetings to the FORTHEM Alliance, our ambitious joint undertaking. For me and my university, all activities of the Alliance are important and strategic, including science. As FORTHEM is also about research, it will be strengthened by the latest success of the Alliance: the FIT FORTHEM project and its key aims, such as working out common research and development policies, exchanging best practices in innovation and jointly applying them in European research programs. Together we shall contribute to research excellency in Europe."

Professor Indriķis Muižnieks, Rector of the University of Latvia, concluded, "Dear Rectors and Presidents! Please accept my greetings from the University of Latvia, from Riga! I would like to express my satisfaction at what we have achieved in the joint work of the university alliance and at the new progress we have made in setting up the FIT FORTHEM project. I would also like to express my conviction that our cooperation will lead to a new dimension in mobility, an increase in new study programmes and also in the research that we will carry out together to promote the development of our society, our countries and the European dimension in higher education."

The FORTHEM Alliance Statute aims to serve as the legal basis for the development of a new European University model for the benefit of the partner universities. This document reflects the aims of the FORTHEM Alliance, its governing bodies and management structures, as well as decision making procedures, obligations of the partners, language policy and other items. The Statute respects the rights of FORTHEM members and will contribute to future stability, trust and fruitful relationship.





After the solemn moment of signing the FORTHEM Alliance Statute, the Heads continued discussions on two crucial topics, namely, the biggest challenge FORTHEM has to overcome and the possible solutions for these challenges.

Prof. Marek Masnyk mentioned the importance of joint research infrastructure for the successful development of joint research and asked how FORTHEM could contribute more in order to make a real impact for communities, cities, and regions; Prof. Vincent Thomas stressed the significance of innovative mobility activities in bringing students and staff together for the improvement of skills, broadening of knowledge, and gaining better mutual understanding. Prof. Fabrizio Micari proposed to pay more attention to digital skills,

as they are extremely essential for future learning; Prof. Georg Krausch pointed out that discussions on the European degree as an instrument that serves to enhance learning and micro-credentials as a more flexible learning opportunity should be taken into account. Prof. Maria Vicenta Mestre Escrivà identified academic excellence as the main challenge of the FORTHEM Alliance and noted that all partners should be united in finding the best solutions; Prof. Keijo Hämäläinen stressed that active involvement of partner universities' students and staff in FORTHEM activities is a serious prerequisite for successful development of the Alliance, and Prof. Indriķis Muižnieks underlined the challenge of future sustainability of the Alliance. The Heads also discussed possible solutions.

The participants of the meeting appreciated the constructive dialogue and stated that the signed FORTHEM Statute and discussions are helpful for fruitful collaboration between the FORTHEM Alliance members.





FIT FORTHEM has kicked off

The official kick-off of the Horizon 2020-funded project launches the implementation of transformative goals for the Alliance.

FIT FORTHEM, which stands for Fostering Institutional Transformation of R&I Policies in European Universities, is a three-year long common endeavor of seven FORTHEM Alliance partner universities. It is also a strategic project dedicated to further alignment of structures and actions of European Universities Network. The project ensures 2 million EUR of funding for a tighter collaboration on excellence in joint research, effective co-creation and transfer of R&I, impact on policy, and upscaling of research management skills.

Some history

Back in spring 2020, the Alliance decided to apply for additional funding from the Horizon 2020 framework program for research and innovation and answer the call within the “Science for and with Society: Support for the Research and Innovation Dimension of European Universities.” After weeks of negotiations over possible actions, the division of workload and the budget, the application was submitted by JGU on behalf of FORTHEM. On July 24, 2020 we learnt that the reviewers recommended our project for funding and began planning its start on January 1, 2021.

The path towards formal implementation required still more work. On December 4, 2020 the revised application was ready and the Grant Agreement was signed between the European Commission and JGU – the project leader. By December 22, 2020 all FORTHEM partner university Rectors had signed an additional Consortium Agreement, which regulates the cooperation within FIT FORTHEM. Due to the pandemic, the official kick-off event, planned for 25 and 26 January 2021, had to be transferred online. It was organized and moderated by prof. dr. Stefan Müller-Stach – the Coordinator of FIT FORTHEM – and dr. Nicole Birkle from JGU.

Kick-off participants

Three special guests accepted the invitation to the FIT FORTHEM kick-off. Project officer assigned to FIT FORTHEM Charles de Chefdebien and Isabelle de Meeus d’Argenteuil, a financial officer from the Research Executive Agency, explained the rules of implementation and reporting of the project. Policy officer Stijn Delaure from Directorate-General for Research and

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Innovation highlighted the role of the European Universities Network for policy development. Projects such as FIT FORTHEM are to provide important insights for the European Commission's Higher Education Transformation Agenda and future calls within Horizon Europe. The kick-off was an opportunity for the FIT FORTHEM General Assembly to convene for the first time. Each university delegated two staff members and one student to this executive body, chaired by prof. dr. Stefan Müller-Stach (JGU) with dr. Timo Taskinen (JYU) as the vice chair, and prof. dr. Fabrizio D'Avenia (UNIPA) as the project's liaison with FORTHEM. It has been stressed that FIT FORTHEM must complement, not compete with, FORTHEM missions. It will also allow more opportunities for Alliance sustainability through each university's further institutional transformations.

The universities also presented their nominated delegates to External Advisory Board. These renowned experts from various sectors and institutions will comment on FIT FORTHEM reports, advise on possible expansions of the project, and recommend paths to sustainability and external collaboration. You will find their names on the FIT FORTHEM webpage under the tab "structures."

Ambitious plans

As any kick-off event, this one was also devoted to detailed presentations of objectives, tasks and deliverables by work package leaders, followed by inspiring discussions and intense planning. FIT FORTHEM work packages and leaders are: (1) Project management and (2) Intercultural sensitization and professionalization in research and innovation management (JGU) dr. Nicole Birkle; (3) Co-creation of common long-term R&I agendas for FORTHEM (UVEG) dr. María D. Pitarch; (4) Connect, access, and share R&I resources (UNIPA) prof. dr. Fabrizio D'Avenia; (5) Living Labs for societally embedded co-creation of knowledge (JYU) dr. Riikka Reitzer; (6) Establishing a joint virtual research policy and services office (uB) prof. dr. Frédéric Debeaufort; (7) Dissemination and Communication (UO) prof. dr. Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska.

All partner universities will be involved in a range of tasks. First, they will collaboratively develop action plans for joint research and innovation policies – including open science and research agendas – in order to achieve several overarching goals of the Alliance. The grant will help to sustain joint research activities in the FORTHEM labs, which could nurture long-term integration. The Alliance will exchange best practices of co-creating knowledge with external stakeholders and will work on common strategies for mutual access to partners' research infrastructures.

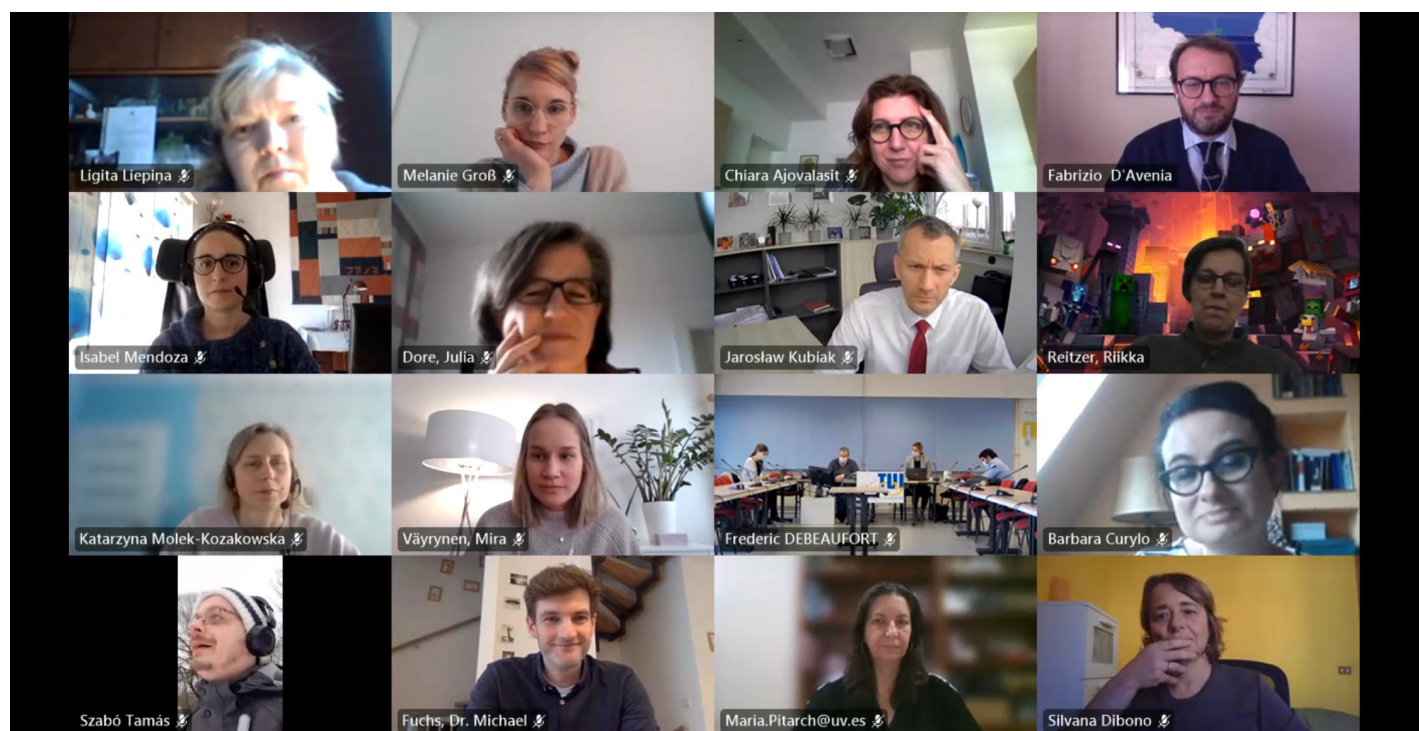
With peer and expert groups, dedicated workshops and intense boot camps, new professional career paths for researchers and research managers will be opened.

Even though it was virtual, the kick-off was an opportunity to get to know the tasks, the leaders and the experts who are to be involved in FIT FORTHEM for the next three years and to set up collaboration on initial tasks. The full scope of transformative goals that this endeavor could foster in the Alliance were made apparent. To follow the project's developments, check the FORTHEM website and social media.

What can YOU expect from FIT FORTHEM?

If you are a faculty member or staff member of any of the partner universities:

- you can contribute to common long-term R&I agendas of the Alliance by participating in focus groups or interviews, or replying to surveys, where you can share information and ideas about your research unit's contribution to common strategy;
- you can make use of workshops and trainings in open science and data management, science communication, science management, or co-creation (especially if you are an early-career researcher);
- you can make use of workshops and trainings in open science and data management, science communication, science management, or co-creation (especially if you are an early-career researcher);
- you can accept invitation to one of many expert groups that will provide advice and peer support to develop a more aligned research policy and resolve research management practicalities (especially if you are an experienced researcher);
- you may consent to being listed in a database of researchers that helps in match-making and collaborative project work across the universities and with external stakeholders;
- you can share your ideas as to how to make it easier to access specialized resources and data that are available in partner universities;
- you can make use of a peer support network (virtual office) that shares advice on how to find and structure grant proposals and grant applications;
- if you work in a FORTHEM Lab, you can develop a pilot study that involves several universities and external partners, and apply for internal funding (follow announcements about calls for proposals); if you are a science popularizer, join us in making the project more visible and the FORTHEM Alliance more sustainable.



FORTHEM Activities

Speed dating

The first FORTHEM Speed dating event took place on 15th December 2020. Over 100 participants from all 7 FORTHEM partner universities signed up for a virtual presentation of the possible collaboration between the academics in the field of language studies, literature, linguistics and communication.

After a short presentation of the possibilities of collaboration, the participants were free to move from one breakout room to another where they could meet their colleagues and develop ideas for new collaborations. The first part of the event was held in English, but during the second part the part many of the groups decided to foster multilingualism and continue their discussions in different languages of our alliance and beyond. The event itself took place in ZOOM and it turned out to be a very good solution for managing around 30 small groups at the same time.

The participants were able to find all the information on a dedicated Sway page and they had a possibility to post about their interests in a common document where other participants could identify possible common interests and start new collaboration.

The event was a huge success, the participants welcomed the concept and the possibility to meet colleagues from different countries.

The FORTHEM alliance will therefore, in the following months, organise a series of virtual Speed Dating events, each dedicated to a different discipline or set of disciplines.

The next Speed dating event is planned in the field of history and philosophy within the dates March 22-25. Follow the information on the FORTHEM web site and social media.

Given the specific nature of different events, our organisational team welcomes everyone who wishes to propose or get involved in setting up disciplinary meetings (we need output from academics to best adapt each

event to the specificities of their particular discipline) and disseminate the event among their colleagues. Your local FORTHEM office remains at your disposal for any further information.

Multilateral Erasmus agreement

Multilateral Erasmus agreement signed between FORTHEM universities giving possibilities for increasing number of student and staff mobilities.

A multilateral and multidisciplinary Erasmus agreement has been recently signed between all FORTHEM universities for the academic year 2021-2022. The agreement will widen the possibilities for Erasmus student, teacher and staff exchange in a variety of fields between the alliance universities. Compared to the earlier signed Erasmus agreements between individual FORTHEM alliance universities, the newly signed multilateral agreement allows a considerably larger number of mobilities in a much wider range of fields to take place between the FORTHEM universities. Also, the agreement will enable students from the FORTHEM universities to take part in FORTHEM Campuses, jointly organized semester-long exchange programmes on rotating hosting campuses, at the University of Burgundy in autumn 2021 and at the University of Latvia in spring 2022. A FORTHEM multilateral Erasmus agreement for the new Erasmus programme period from 2022 onwards will be signed later this year and will include an even wider array of study fields and many more exchange opportunities for students and staff of the FORTHEM alliance universities.



FORTHEM partner universities

Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), Germany

University of Burgundy (Université de Bourgogne), France

University of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylän yliopisto), Finland

University of Opole (Uniwersytet Opolski), Poland

University of Palermo (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Italy

University of Latvia (Latvijas Universitāte), Latvia

University of Valencia (Universitat de Valencia), Spain



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