

## The Austrian **Eurasia-Pacific Uninet** – EPU

### Charter

#### Article I – The Network

##### Vision

EPU provides the platform for academic cooperation between Austria and partner institutions in the Eurasia-Pacific regions. We develop and strengthen ties within this network to support excellence, equality and sustainability, and to serve as a best practice model for international collaboration.

##### Mission

Our mission is to facilitate bilateral and multilateral exchange and cooperation contributing to the growth of individuals, programs and institutions. Specifically, we aim to:

- encourage and facilitate relationships between universities through engagement in initiatives related to education, science, technology, innovation and art in the countries of the partner institutions,
- connect within these initiatives with civil society, governmental and non-governmental organizations and economic actors,
- contribute to solving global problems through research, specifically in the target areas set out in the sustainable development goals and inter alia guided by the International Science Council action plan,
- enable and support cooperation between academic institutions in student and faculty exchange, teaching and research activities,
- increase intercultural exchange and understanding by promoting scientific, cultural and human relationships and personal contacts.

##### Objectives

- To promote networking and cooperation between academic institutions and their faculty, staff and students.
- To initiate research and education activities based on common goals.
- To establish a solid communication structure between Austrian and EPU partner institutions in higher education.
- To maintain a platform for long-term scientific discourses.
- To establish contacts with governmental and non-governmental organizations and enterprises.
- To provide expertise in the higher education and research landscape in the EPU regions.
- To cooperate in the area of further and continuing education.
- To jointly facilitate access to scholarships and research funding.

## Principles

Through joining the Network, all partners agree on the following common principles:

- Open science makes scientific research (including publications, data, physical samples, software and educational resources) reproducible and openly accessible to all domains of society. Open science creates and transparently shares knowledge across collaborative networks.
- Support for the eight pillars identified by the European Commission to promote open science: FAIR Data, Research Integrity, Next Generation Metrics, Future of Scholarly Communication, Citizen Science, Education and Skills, Rewards and Incentives, and the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).
- Within the context of globalization and of internationalization of education and research, EPU emphasizes equal footing in collaboration, as well as in scientific and intercultural exchange.
- Commitment to academic freedom; data security and intellectual property; excellence and openness in research; ethics, integrity and trust.
- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals serve as guidance for establishing priorities in capacity building and research.

## Article II – Partnership

Partnership in the Network is open to universities, research institutions, and academic organizations from Austria and from countries within the geographical scope of the Network: East Asia, South Asia and the Central Asia – Caucasus region.

Prospective partners shall submit an application outlining their institution's research and academic activities focusing on international collaboration, stating objectives for collaboration within the Network, and a commitment to Article I of this charter. A letter of recommendation from a current partner or regional coordinator in support of an application for partnership is welcome.

Partnership is subject to approval by the Network's Board after soliciting comments from the representatives to the General Assembly. Partnership is finalized by signing a 'Declaration of Collaboration' (DoC) between the partner's legal representative and the Network President.

Current EPU partners are required to update and continue their partnership in EPU by signing this 'Declaration of Collaboration' as well.

Partnership is defined per calendar year, starting from the date of approval by the Board.

Partnership is contingent on payment of annual fees as proposed by the Board and accepted by the General Assembly. Fees can be adjusted for partners from the OECD DAC list of ODA recipient countries.

Partnership can be terminated (i) by a letter of resignation sent to the OeAD Network Office, (ii) automatically following a two-year lapse of fee payments, or (iii) by the General Assembly (optionally preceded by a suspension) if the conduct of a partner is detrimental to the interests of the Network or if it contradicts the Charter. The partner concerned must be informed in writing (by e-mail or registered letter) of the suspension and termination and of the reasons which led to this decision of the General Assembly.



## Article III – Governance

### General Assembly

Each partner nominates in writing one representative to the General Assembly. The General Assembly aims at meeting in person in biannual intervals at Plenary Meetings hosted by one of the Network partners. Online meetings are scheduled in intervening years or as deemed necessary by the Board or the Presidency.

The General Assembly adopts this Charter by a simple majority. Future changes to the Charter require a two thirds majority. The General Assembly will debate general strategies for EPU. Any resolutions documenting agreements require support from the Board and a simple majority, or are highlighted as a General Assembly consensus.

The General Assembly takes note of Curatorium elections to the Presidency and the Board by Austrian partners. It elects up to three additional Board members from nominations by international partners, and an International Vice President from these.

The General Assembly is consulted by the Board upon receipt of network partnership applications.

The General Assembly is convened by the President and prepared by the Network Office on her or his behalf. The Network Office will announce the venue and time to all partners at least 3 months in advance and send the agenda together with the associated documents and background information to all partner representatives no later than 14 days before the General Assembly.

Quorum: The General Assembly has a quorum if the President or the Vice-President and at least 50% of the representatives entitled to vote are present (physically or online). All partner representatives who have paid their network fee in the respective year are entitled to participate and vote. A vote may be transferred to another representative by sending a written proxy to the Network Office, including a statement of consent of the persons concerned. A person cannot hold more than one proxy vote.

Resolutions in the General Assembly shall be passed by a simple majority of votes. Exceptions are the amendment of the Charter and the discontinuation of the Network. For these cases, a two-thirds majority will be required. In the event of a tie, the President shall have the deciding vote.

OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research are invited to nominate non-voting representatives to the General Assembly.

### Curatorium

The 'Curatorium' serves as an assembly (caucus) of all Austrian partner representatives and therefore is a subset within the General Assembly. Curatorium members also act as EPU coordinators for their respective institutions.

The Curatorium is chaired by the current Network president and meets as required to consult on decisions regarding project funding provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

The Curatorium elects four Board members, the President and one Vice President from its members, or from individuals nominated and authorized by Austrian partner institutions.

The Curatorium meets online as needed and according to its Rules of Procedure, and shall meet in-person with a hybrid option at least annually.



## Regional Coordinators

Partners from countries or regions with a clearly defined geographical extent are encouraged to consult with the Board on the option to constitute themselves as a national or a supranational regional assembly, and to identify (by election or by acclamation) a national or regional coordinator.

Regional coordinators shall represent all partners from the respective country or region and can also be nominated as candidates for election to the Board.

## Board

The Board consists of four full (voting) members representing the diversity of Austrian academic network partners elected by the Curatorium. All board members standing for election need to be authorized by their respective partner institutions.

Another three full (voting) Board members are elected by the international representatives in the General Assembly reflecting the geographical and institutional diversity of network partners. Each region (East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia – Caucasus) shall be represented by one Board member.

The President and Vice Presidents are ex officio members of the Board.

Board meetings are convened by the President or when requested by at least three Board members and are prepared by the Network Office. The Network Office will announce the time and venue or platform to all Board members at least 2 weeks in advance and send the agenda together with the associated documents and background information to all Board members no later than 3 days before the meeting.

The Board takes decisions with a simple majority when at least 5 members or a majority of the number of currently serving elected Board members participate. The President's vote is considered decisive in case of a tie. A maximum of 9 votes can be cast on the Board: 4+3 plus President or Vice President, plus International Vice President.

All members of the Board can be assigned specific roles or portfolios.

The Board serves a four-year period of office starting with the General Assembly adopting this Charter. Re-election of Board members for subsequent or later periods is possible. Whenever needed, by-elections are conducted for the remainder of a period.

OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalization and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research are invited to nominate non-voting members of the Board.

## Presidency

The Network President and a Vice President are elected by the Curatorium according to its Rules of Procedure from Austrian partners. The President also acts as Austrian National Coordinator. The Vice President shall assist the President in fulfilling all duties and acts as a deputy in her or his absence.

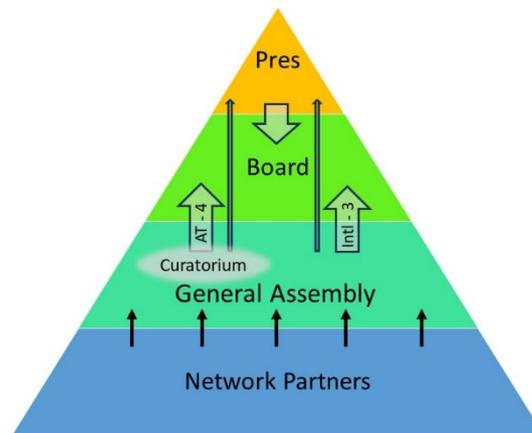
The President shall provide strategic leadership, oversee the implementation of Network activities, and represent the Network in external engagements. The President chairs meetings of all governing bodies and is substituted by the Vice President as needed. In case of President and Vice President unable to chair a meeting, the oldest Austrian member of the Board currently present takes on this task.



An International Vice President can be elected by the international representatives to the General Assembly by international representatives to the General Assembly. The International Vice President represents international partners in the Presidency and advises on their interests.

President and Vice Presidents serve four-year periods of office synchronous with Board periods, with a total maximum of two periods. Whenever needed, special elections for remaining periods of office are held for presidency offices, with partial periods counting towards the maximum of two.

Members of the Presidency and the Board elected by the Curatorium ahead of a General Assembly are introduced to the General Assembly at its next meeting.



*Governance Structure*

## Article IV – Network Activities

The Eurasia-Pacific Uninet facilitates, organizes, and manages a range of actions in support of the objectives stated in Article I. This includes, but is not limited to:

- annual calls for exploratory projects providing seed funding for multilateral research
- student and faculty mobility, e.g., in the framework of Erasmus+
- initiating joint project applications and research initiatives addressing suitable funding bodies
- forming and managing joint centers of expertise and excellence in specific disciplines
- (co-) organizing summer schools and other short intensive programs
- mutually consulting on curriculum development, review and assessment
- collaborating in higher education assessment and ranking exercises
- exploring opportunities for joint courses in online and blended formats
- advising on access to scholarships research funding opportunities
- contributing to international supervision of doctoral candidates
- exploring pathways towards joint study programs leading to multiple or joint degrees.

Overall, Network activities aim to achieve multiplication effects by leveraging small actions and initiatives towards major impacts. Collaboration aims at linking with partners through multiple actions typically involving several disciplines.

## Article V – Operating Procedures

Language of communication including all documents relevant for international partners is English.

Meetings, votes, and communications in digital-online or in-person formats are considered equivalent. Circulation votes can be conducted on urgent or minor matters.

To support the operational tasks of the Network and to ensure continuity throughout presidencies, an EPU Network Office is established at OeAD. The office is co-funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). This office together with a secretariat also supports the Presidency and the Board in all tasks and activities.

The Network Office serves as an administrative and operational interface to all Network Partners. Tasks expressly include partner's details and maintenance of contacts; invoicing, administration and reporting network fees; public relations, communication and online platforms; preparation and support of meetings; liaison with BMBWF regarding funding; administration of and reporting on BMBWF funded projects, initiatives and scholarships; liaison with Austrian interest groups as well as partner country representations; and synergetic linking with other OeAD administered programs.

Partnership fees are dedicated to operations of the Presidency and the Board, maintenance of a Presidency secretariate, the organization of Network meetings, and supporting administration, travel, hospitality for visiting delegations and communication.

The Network Office provides reports to the General Assembly documenting the use of partnership fees (revenue / expenditure accounting) and budget outlooks.

Funding for specific initiatives, projects, and outreach (e.g., academic exhibitions) is expected to be obtained from additional resources.

Any disagreements or disputes among partners regarding policies, strategies, and activities within EPU shall be resolved in an amicable way by Communication, Collaboration and Compromise – 'C3'.

## Article VI – Final Provisions

This Charter shall come into effect upon its adoption by the General Assembly.

All changes to this Charter are valid immediately upon adoption by the General Assembly, suggestions from partners are subject to two weeks' prior notice.

The President shall be responsible for ensuring the implementation and enforcement of this Charter, with the support of the Board and all partner institutions.

*Adopted by the General Assembly in Vienna on September 27, 2024.*

