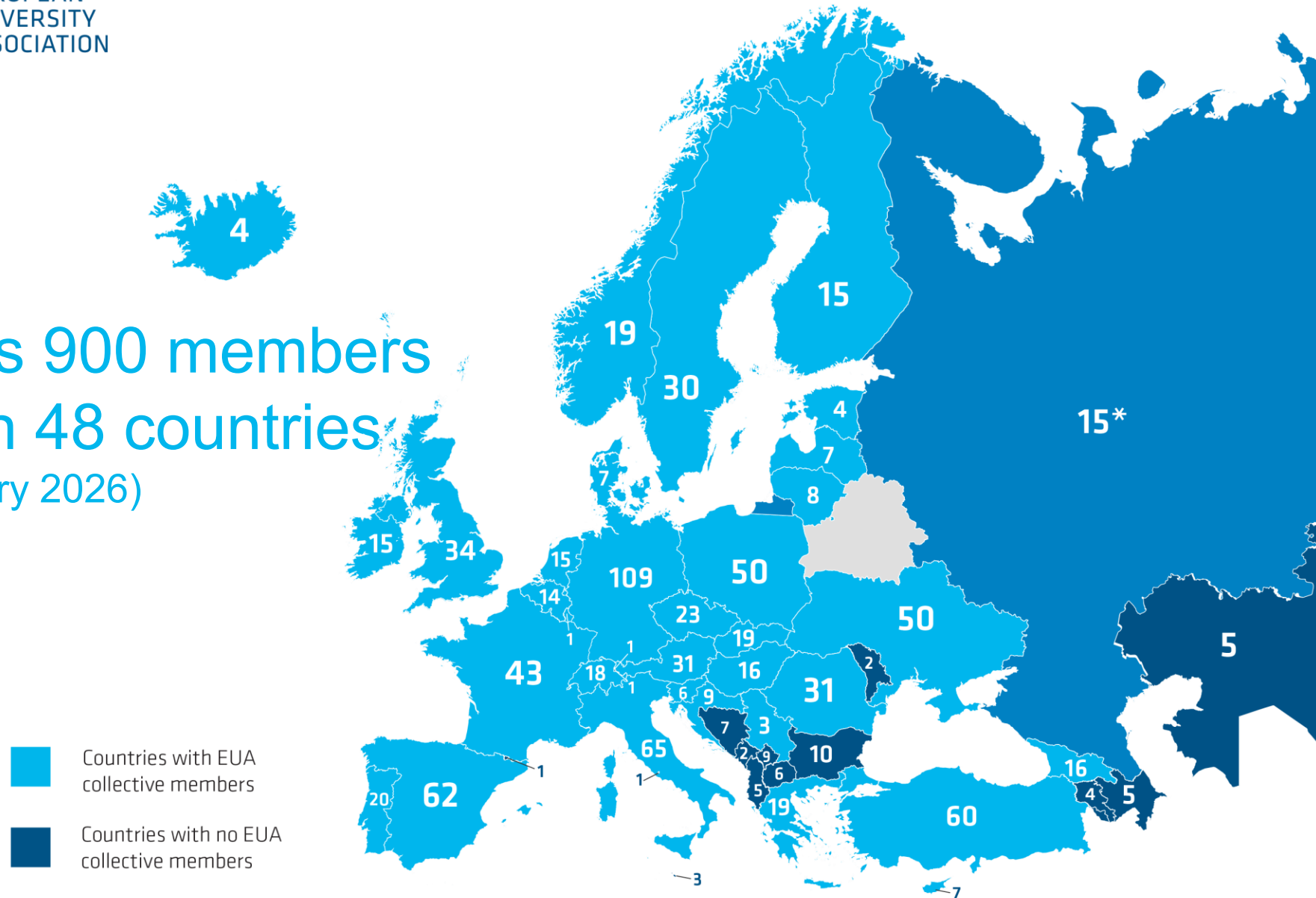


Key findings – European University Association report on “Universities and competitiveness”

Thomas Ekman Jørgensen
Director, Policy Coordination and Foresight
European University Association

5 March 2026

EUA has 900 members
based in 48 countries
(as of January 2026)

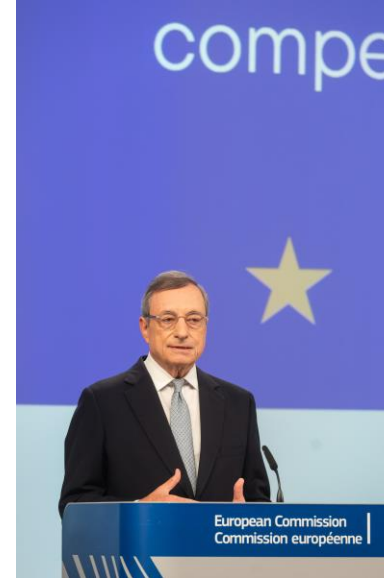


** Following a statement by the Russian Union of Rectors (RUR) supporting the invasion of Ukraine, EUA suspended Russian member universities whose leaders signed the statement.*

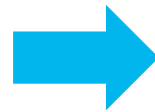
Main objectives

- **Facilitates dialogue** on higher education & research
- **Represents the interests** of higher education sector
- Ensures the voice of universities is heard in **EU policy making & in the EHEA**
- **Support its members** with a range of **services** (strategy development, thematic peer groups & focus groups, events and publications)

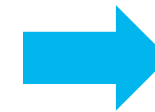
Recap – the competitiveness narrative



Emergency –
European security
and the European
way of life is at
stake



**Europe must engage in
deep reforms – single
market, capital,
"research and
innovation at the
heart"**



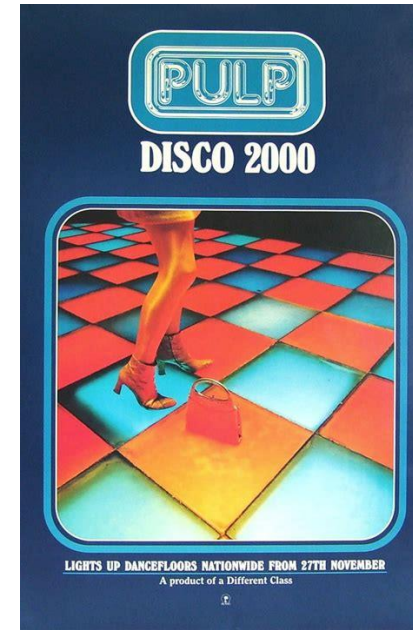
**More focused priorities,
more investment
Market reforms**

A look back



1990s and 2000s

- From research to revenue
- Creative class

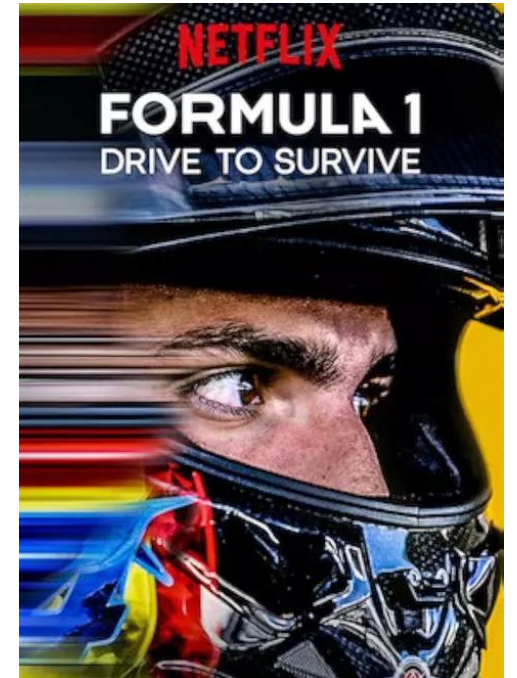


2010s and early 2020s

- Sustainable development – broader frame

2025

- Competitiveness (sustainable prosperity)



The future



General feeling of precariousness

The VUCA World (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous)

- Polycrisis (pandemic, war, climate crisis, political change, economic crisis)

Need to go beyond trends analysis and be creative

Three scenarios – conversation starters

- All promises fulfilled (resurrection)
- Authoritarian turn (agony)
- Fragmentation

Resurrection (à la Draghi)



Massive investments in research and innovation

Top down priorities (by the enlightenend bureaucrats?)

- Defence
- Clean technologies

Demographic decline partly countered through immigration

Climate crisis

Agony



US hegemony

Big tech control

Autocratic governments

- Universities must deliver solutions
... without critical reflection

Demographic decline – no respite

Climate deteriorates

Academia between protection, support and
resistance

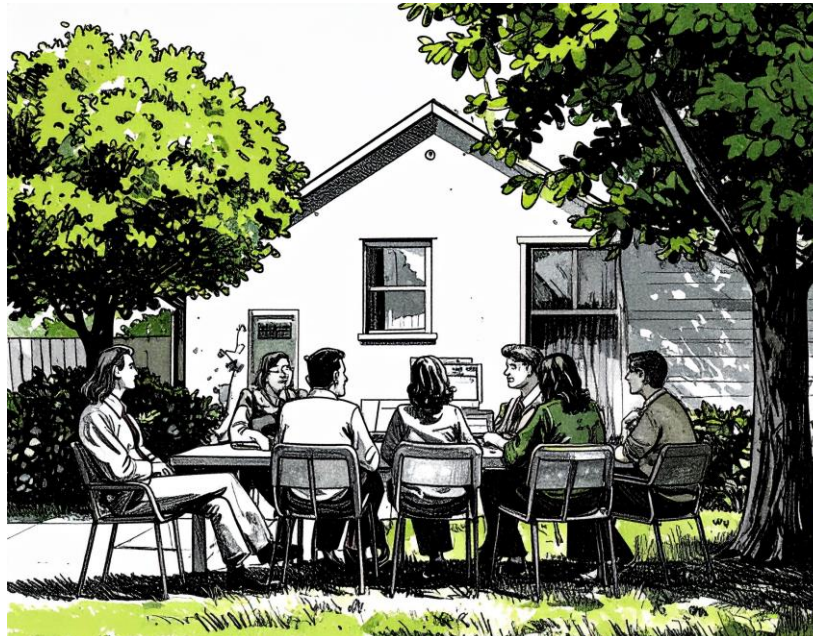
Fragmentation



Governments and industry are weak

Turning inwards to **communities**

Academic knowledge for the **lucky few**



Challenges for universities

Universities are under pressure in all scenarios

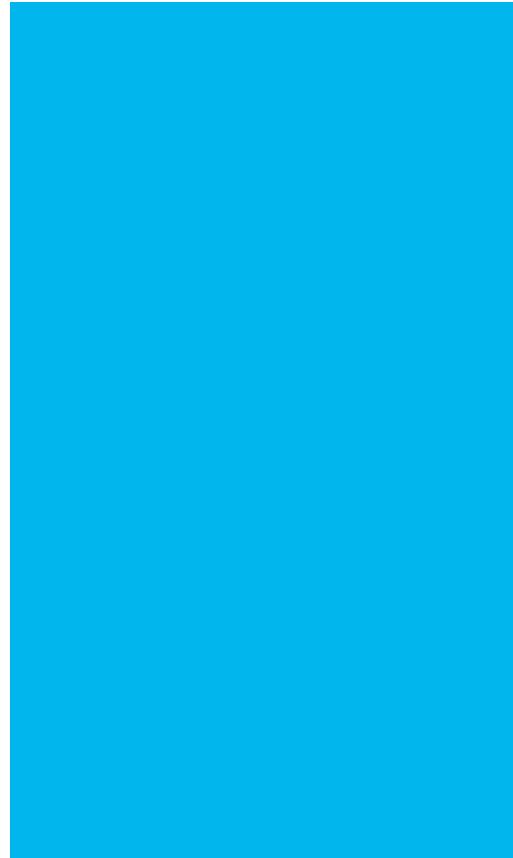
- Resurrection through control and steering
- Full political instrumentalisation in autocracy
- Collapse of state support in a fragmented society

Many university leaders share the basic view of competitiveness and emergency

- *Optimism prevails*
- Sharpen university profiles in their ecosystems
- Contributing on the basis of universities' values

The whole story

Report



Universities and competitiveness

**A big picture view on the EU's new
policy paradigm and the implications
for universities**

By Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Thomas E. Jørgensen, Liliya Kukuruza

Thank you for your attention

