

TH Insights

Inaugural Consortium Meeting of the European Neighbours Initiative at TH Wildau, October 27-28, 2022

In 2021 TH Wildau initiated a stronger cooperation between some of its long-standing partner universities in immediate neighbouring countries. The "European Neighbours Initiative" (ENI) is intended to support a strategic orientation of internationalisation within Europe (for further details: <https://en.th-wildau.de/university/central-facilities/centre-for-international-affairs/international-office/european-neighbours-initiative-eni/>)

In October 2022, the consortium of the European Neighbours Initiative (ENI) met for its first annual meeting in person at the invitation of TH Wildau. All 7 member institutions of the ENI were represented. In addition to TH Wildau, these were: Poznań University of Technology (Poland), FH Salzburg (Austria), HAN University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), Technical University of Liberec (Czech Republic), VIVES University of Applied Sciences (Belgium) and Université Jean Monnet (France).

Participants had various reasons for coming to Wildau. One participant said that "I choose to attend because I wanted to meet all the academic partners and plan some concrete projects with them." Another was "looking for opportunities to apply for joint grants in the field of entrepreneurship and science-business cooperation".

Participants arrived from across Europe on the afternoon of October 27. The first event was a social dinner at the Villa am See in Wildau. On Friday October 28th the ENI Consortium Meeting began more formally with the ENI Consortium Workshop. President Tippe opened the workshop, welcoming all the participants and noting the importance of strengthening TH Wildau's ties to its European partners through the European Neighbours Initiative. Dr. Jeffrey Wolf, TH Wildau's ENI Coordinator, then gave a short presentation about the European Neighbours Initiative and the goals of the ENI Workshop. For the next hour, participants broke up into 4 groups to discuss the challenges and opportunities the ENI presented to them and their institutions, in terms of academic programmes, mobility, online and virtual collaboration, and joint research.

Prior to lunch, participants were invited to a keynote lecture by Prof. Dr. Felix Ackermann (FernUniversität Hagen). He spoke about the roles and responsibilities of universities and academic research in times of international conflict, highlighting his own experience living and working in Belarus before and after the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, connecting this to more recent events in Ukraine and Russia. The lecture was followed by a lively discussion that encompassed not just practical questions about what universities should do, but deeper questions about how to reconcile one's work life with the many political, economic, and health crises ongoing in the world today.

After lunch, participants were able to join a campus tour, led by TH Wildau's Dr. Lena Gautum. She highlighted the VINN:Lab, the logistics laboratory, the University Library and various buildings and sites on campus that held special historical importance, including the locomotive and the exhibit dedicated to the international labourers in Wildau who were forced to work for Nazi Germany during WWII.

The formal end of the Conference occurred in Halle 14 at the Exhibition on TH Wildau's first 30 years, where participants were impressed by the various artifacts on display. Optional afternoon workshops included one on a newly established CLIL4ALL Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership, and another one on double-degree collaborations with an exchange of best practices ideas.

According to informal and formal feedback, the ENI meeting was a great success, both in terms of personal and strategic networking. According to participants who completed an evaluation after the Consortium Meeting, 60% found the overall results of the Meeting to be 'very good', while the other 40% thought it was 'good'.

There is interest in joint module and study programmes, student and lecturer mobility, joint third-party funded projects and much more. Coordinators and working groups will be set up for further planning. And the next meeting will take place at the invitation of another university in the consortium.

Looking back on the ENI Consortium Meeting almost a month later, Dr. Jeffrey Wolf observed that "Our ENI partners were genuinely enthusiastic to come to Wildau in person and to begin working concretely together on our many overlapping interests. There was a sense, at the end, that in fact the Consortium Meeting was too short because there was so much more we wish to do together. Enthusiasm for meeting again next year is already quite high, and we will do our best to expand upon the foundation we built during this inaugural meeting at TH Wildau."