

Editorial: Policy Dialogue #4

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# The new geopolitics of Higher Education and Research





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The fourth edition of our Policy Dialogues on Higher Education and Research was held as part of the British Council France's insight and engagement scheme. This event was jointly organised with Sciences Po, the French Embassy in London and University College London (UCL). This fourth edition was twofold and focused on the new geopolitics of Higher Education and Research.

## Amba-series Part 1

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# Sino-American relations in Higher Education and Research: opportunities and constraints for direct partners



On 24 February 2022, the British Council France together with Sciences Po/CERI and the French Embassy in the UK, jointly held the 4<sup>th</sup> Policy Dialogue which, since this series of conferences were launched in 2019, has become a platform for reflection and sharing of best practices on key topics related to education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This event was the first part of a joint Ambassadorial series on the new geopolitics of Higher Education and Research whose aim is twofold: the first focused on the Sino-American relationships and the second will look at an upheaval of European collaboration in times of crisis.

Assuming the strategic rivalry between China and the US will shape tomorrow's world in all sectors, it is quite clear that the global geopolitics of Higher Education & Research will be impacted. New players are currently emerging, which could either represent an opportunity or a threat. Especially countries such as the UK and Australia, will need to readapt their strategies to maintain their leading role in Higher Education and Research.

The main purpose of this 4<sup>th</sup> edition was to better understand the ongoing geopolitical changes and their consequences, and to reflect on the opportunities and constraints that Sino-American relations in Higher Education and Research represent for direct partners.

## Opening

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**Anne Duncan**  
President  
British Council France

**“The Sino American rivalry has a huge impact on Higher Education sector and affects international students’ mobility. A strong Europe including the UK is an important part of this equation.”**

**“When political tensions appear between countries worldwide or at bilateral level the Higher Education and Research communities are particularly impacted and science diplomacy must be deployed to maintain the ties, prepare the future and return to normal.”**



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**Minh-Hà Pham**  
Scientific Counsellor  
French Embassy in the UK



## Roundtable discussion

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### Pr. Stéphanie Balme

Dean of the Undergraduate  
College of Sciences Po

**“China’s scientific power is a medium size Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) power and Higher Education power but a very promising one.”**

**“A call is growing in Europe for academic freedom to be taken into account as a criteria for rankings. Europe has been incapable of setting up its own classification system.”**

As a leading researcher and specialist of China, Professor Stéphanie Balme delivered a keynote speech on China’s long-term science diplomacy strategy which began in the late 1970s. She outlines the fact that China is a scientific power in the making, that has progressed very rapidly and has become the second largest provider of scientific articles behind the US, and has also overtaken the EU in terms of chairs.

However, despite being prominent when it comes to the number of articles, pertaining to the qualitative aspect, China only comes fourth in terms of citations and has a limited number of co-publications. She advocates collaborating with China instead of containing it.



### Pierre Buhler

Policy Officer in charge of Influence Diplomacy at the Center for  
Prospective and Strategy of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry

**“Confucius Institutes are a tool in the hands of the communist party to influence host institutions, particularly higher education institutions”.**

Pierre Buhler, Advisor in charge of cultural diplomacy and soft power issues at the CAPS (Centre d’Analyse, de Prévision et de Stratégie), emphasises that China has made its culture and language the third pillar of its diplomacy, after politics and economics. Thus, since 2004, China has been developing its Confucius Institutes worldwide to promote the Chinese language and culture. In 2018, 548 Confucius Institutes were operating in universities throughout the world.



## Roundtable discussion

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### Sarah Spreitzer

Assistant Vice President and Chief of Staff  
of the American Council on Education

**“International students and global partners are incredibly important to US Higher Education. We submitted a statement in 2018 that said: despite the desire to protect national security, we must remain a destination of choice and a welcoming country to international students, scholars, scientists and researchers who enrich our campuses and play an important role in performing research that creates knowledge, supports US economic growth and fuels American innovation.”**

As Assistant Vice President and Chief of Staff of the American Council on Education, Sarah Spreitzer gives a US perspective on China’s influence in Higher Education and Research. She pointed out the necessity to maintain the United States as a destination of choice for international students, scholars and scientists.



### Simon Marginson

Professor of Higher Education  
at the University of Oxford

**“Not everything is black and white. Making China our enemy is not the answer.”**

Simon Marginson, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Oxford, had a more nuanced stance. He argues that global science has emerged as a system, beyond the states themselves, and should be driven towards cooperation. US-China collaboration proves to be at the very core of this global cooperation, with 63 000 collaborative papers in 2020, which is almost twice the second largest collaboration between the US and the UK.

In addition, nearly 40% of all Chinese collaborative papers are jointly written with American scientists, making it a peer-to-peer relationship, he added.

## Amba-series Part 2

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# Competition vs. cooperation in times of crisis: reimagining European collaborations

Sciences has no borders. Bottom-up processes based on interpersonal relationships between academics and scientists are always the strength of a community that naturally maintains bonds of cooperation and even solidarity. Its remarkable mobilization during the Covid crisis and now the Ukrainian crisis have made this clear.

However, in an increasingly tense geopolitical context, the dynamics underpinning European collaborations in the Higher Education and Research ecosystem have been reshuffled, creating both unprecedented power relationships and new expectations for partnerships between universities and for science collaboration.



In 2020, the world leading countries in scientific publications were China, United States, and United Kingdom, with Germany, Italy and France in the lead among European countries (Source: Scopus). How is the mapping of co-publications evolving in a context of major geopolitical reframing? To which extent will the new balance have an impact on scientific cooperation?

The second policy dialogues on the new geopolitics of Higher Education and Research will focus on the evolution of academic competition and collaboration across Europe, the implications for European universities internationalisation and the challenges which arise from new geopolitical balance at European borders.

**1. Who collaborates with whom and how has this changed over time? Have Government and EU-led efforts to internationalise paid off? How can the new format of European universities compete effectively with emerging research powerhouses? What balance might we strike between intra and extra European collaboration, and is there room for greater multilateralism?**

**2. How can European Universities preserve and extend internationalisation activities in a challenging global context? What implications might a fault line between autocracies/ democracies have for international research collaboration?**

**3. How to deal with such emerging challenges as Brexit, distrust of the liberal elite/expertise, scientific isolation in a Ukraine – Russia crisis context, and EU strategic autonomy? In a word, what room is there for science diplomacy and continued work on global challenges?**

## Opening

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**Dr. Catherine Saracco**

Head of Education  
British Council France

**“In times of geopolitical tensions, there is a heightened need for international academic collaborations which is critical to tackle common challenges. European alliances definitely have a huge part to play in this equation.”**

**“Today, in the context of post-Brexit the future of academic collaborations between French and UK universities is questioned in terms of the partnerships. It is important to show that we keep on working together.”**



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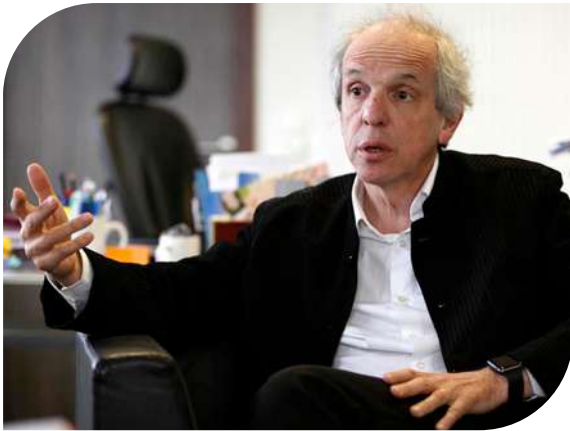
**Minh-Hà Pham**

Scientific Counsellor  
French Embassy in the UK



## Keynote speeches

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**Pr. Alain Beretz**

President  
COST Association

**“If universities want to prove that they are major actors in building a European future, they should accept that they are major actors in European politics, but with their own tools.”**

**“I strongly believe that European universities can be a strong block in the European construction.”**

Drawing on his experience as former President of the University of Strasbourg and having been commissioned by the French Prime Minister to work on the European Commission’s “European Universities Initiative”, Professor Alain Beretz shared some important lessons.

He underlines the importance of international networks for the development of a university and stated that European alliances are a cornerstone for building Europe. He also emphasises the responsibility of universities not to ignore political issues. However, this should not compromise a university’s academic quality.



**Dr. Uta Staiger**

Executive Director of the European Institute  
and Pro Vice-Provost, Europe, UCL

**“We see a shift away from collaboration towards an idea of competition.”**

**“From a UK perspective, bilateral initiatives, and strategies independent of multilateral funding have become vital. We have to continue to make the case to our national governments and the EU that multilateral academic collaboration with Europe is indispensable.”**

Dr. Uta Staiger who plays a strategic role in UCL’s involvement in European Research and Higher Education, gave her perspective on European collaborations. She points out that collaboration with the UK increases the impact and influence of EU scientific activities, which can only remain competitive through a multilateral approach. More than a third of UK research papers are co-authored with other EU and associated countries compared to only 17,5% for the USA.

## Roundtable discussion



### Pr. Christine Musselin

CNRS research director, lecturer at Sciences Po,  
Centre de Sociologie des Organisations

**“One important way to develop more cooperation within Europe would be to harmonize the different systems so that academics consider the normal space they develop is Europe and not national countries.”**

**“Once members from European alliances regard themselves as European academics rather than academics from their country, then we will have achieved the goal of European universities.”**

As a leading expert on universities and their governance, Professor Christine Musselin argues that there has been an increase in competition in the last decade at European level but also more globally. She stated that governments have developed institutional policy instruments in order to increase competition in Higher Education and Research (LERU, Russel group, The Guild, Udice...), hence strengthening a fierce competition between institutions.

This is a game changer in the Higher Education landscape insofar as scientific competition is now playing out between institutions and not between nations or researchers as was the case in many countries before. Professor Musselin also outlined that European countries' national policies do not aim at European construction so much but mainly at achieving global excellence in order to become the best.



### Dr. Vincent Carpentier

Reader in the History of Education, IOE,  
UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

**“Academic collaboration should be about developing Europe and developing a global cosmopolitan society.”**

Dr Vincent Carpentier, a specialist of the socio-economic history of Higher Education, stresses the importance of structures in the sphere of Higher Education and Research. While we face a major crisis at the moment with intertwined challenges at the economic, political, social and geopolitical levels, COVID-19 offered opportunities to reflect on such changes in certain ways.

He advocates for cooperation and collaboration between institutions that are globally engaged while stressing that they shouldn't lose sight of their respective Higher Education systems.

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