

Franco-Dutch cooperation in higher education and research

Call to Action

The Hague, December 6, 2024

On December 5th and 6th, a delegation of presidents from French universities and engineering schools visited Dutch universities, research organizations, and governmental bodies. The mission, organized to foster closer academic and research ties between France and the Netherlands, featured a bilateral dialogue, chaired and hosted by the Ambassador of France at the Résidence de France in The Hague. The discussions brought together prominent representatives from both countries' higher education and research sectors, with a central focus on four key objectives aimed at strengthening Franco-Dutch cooperation.

1. Strengthening European Autonomy in Key Innovation Areas

In a rapidly shifting global context, ensuring Europe's technological and academic sovereignty has become ever more urgent. The High-Level Roundtable on European Technological Autonomy held during the April 2023 state visit of President Emmanuel Macron to the Netherlands underscored the necessity of reinforcing Europe's leadership in key innovation areas. Amid rising geopolitical tensions, increasing technological dependencies, and societal challenges, it is crucial to enhance collaboration between European universities to safeguard Europe's role as a global leader in education and research. This cooperation will not only contribute to Europe's autonomy but also ensure that it can continue to lead in innovation, addressing critical issues such as climate change, technological disruption, and global health.

2. Promoting high-quality education and enhancing academic mobility

Academic mobility is essential to foster intellectual development, cultural exchange, and the formation of networks that transcend borders. This mobility is especially crucial for young researchers and students, who are the leaders of tomorrow. The French and Dutch delegations emphasized the importance of increased student and researcher mobility between the two countries, aligning with broader European initiatives like the European Universities Alliances. Among the 13 alliances, several Franco-Dutch partnerships are already flourishing, and the goal is to further enhance these connections.

Key actions include:

- Strengthening existing exchange programs like Erasmus+.
- Expanding opportunities for joint degrees and competitive scholarships.

The aim is not only to retain Europe's brightest minds but to empower them with the tools and opportunities to shape the future of the continent.

3. Encouraging Investments in European Research and Development

As highlighted in the Draghi Report, Europe faces critical challenges in maintaining its global competitiveness. The report stresses the need to retain talent, reduce dependence on non-European technologies, and invest in cutting-edge innovation. Both French and Dutch universities recognize the importance of fostering strong academic and technological ecosystems that promote collaboration and drive European innovation. The commitment to public and private investment in European R&D will be central to these efforts. Strengthening collaboration between French and Dutch universities can serve as a model for broader European initiatives that prioritize innovation, excellence, and societal impact.

Key actions include the support of collaborative research in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, energy transition, and climate science.

4. Safeguarding academic values and upholding academic freedom

The safeguarding of academic values and the principles of academic freedom are cornerstones of both the French and Dutch higher education systems. In a time of rising political and social pressures on universities worldwide, ensuring that scholars can freely engage in research and discourse is more important than ever. Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to upholding these values, which are essential for the pursuit of knowledge, academic integrity, and democratic ideals.

The Franco-Dutch presidents of universities circle: advancing bilateral and European collaboration

To further strengthen Franco-Dutch academic ties, a Franco-Dutch Presidents of Universities Circle will be launched. This new forum, comprising the leaders of universities from both countries, will provide a strategic platform for exchanging on common global challenges, objectives and collaborations. The circle will offer a framework for advancing bilateral collaboration between France and the Netherlands in ways that enhance European-wide academic excellence. By fostering joint initiatives, student mobility, co-publications, shared doctoral programs, and align strategies.

The Franco-Dutch collaboration can serve as a blueprint for broader European efforts. As founding members of the European Union and the Bologna Process, our countries play a crucial role in fostering and strengthening a more resilient and competitive European Education Area and European Research Area. Both are essential for the safeguarding Europe's global position in education, research and innovation.

This Circle will build on the historical contributions of both France and the Netherlands to European higher education and research, particularly as founding members of the European Union and the Bologna Process. The ongoing collaboration between universities from both countries will be instrumental in advancing European academic excellence and global competitiveness.

Looking Forward: A Visit by Dutch University Presidents to France

In 2025, Udice plans to organize a reciprocal visit of Dutch university presidents to France. This initiative will deepen the collaboration between French and Dutch higher education institutions, laying the groundwork for even more extensive joint projects, research endeavors, and academic exchanges. By fostering closer ties, both countries aim to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the European Education Area and European Research Area.

Strong collaborations between French and Dutch universities to build FP10: a commitment to academic excellence and innovation.

The continued strengthening of academic and research ties between France and the Netherlands represents a pivotal opportunity for the future of European higher education and research. Both countries have long been champions of academic excellence, technological innovation, and fostering the development of future leaders. By deepening their collaboration, particularly in the context of European programs like FP10 (the 10th Framework Program for Research and Innovation), France and the Netherlands can play a leading role in shaping Europe's strategic initiatives for R&D.

Conclusion

The Franco-Dutch dialogue is a crucial step towards building a more resilient, innovative, and competitive European higher education landscape. Through closer collaboration, shared values, and a commitment to academic excellence, both France and the Netherlands are poised to lead Europe's efforts in addressing global challenges and ensuring the continent's place at the forefront of research and education in the 21st century.

Together, the French and Dutch higher education systems can serve as a model for Europe's future, one grounded in cooperation, innovation, and the pursuit of knowledge.