



Pécsi Tudományegyetem
University of Pécs



WESTERN BALKANS
FORUM on Higher Education
and Innovation

 **studyportals**

Venue: Kodály Centre, University of Pécs, Hungary

Date: October 8-9, 2026

Co-hosts: University of Pécs & Studyportals

Day 1: Strategic Vision & Regional Cooperation

Theme: *The Future of Higher Education in the Western Balkans: Integration, Innovation, and Internationalisation*

08:00–09:00 | Arrival & Registration

- Welcome coffee & informal networking

09:00–09:30 | Opening Ceremony

- **Host welcome:** Prof. Adrián Fábián, Rector, University of Pécs
- **Co-host welcome:** Edwin van Rest, CEO of Studyportals
- **Guests of honour:** Hungarian Prime Minister (TBC)

09:30–10:15 | Opening Keynote

Title: *Bridging Regions, Building Futures: The Role of Higher Education in Regional Integration*

- **Speaker:** Prof. Jo Ritzen (previously Dutch Minister for Education and Science, then President of Maastricht University, and is now the driving force behind 'Empower European Universities' (EEU) (confirmed)





10:15–11:00 | Panel 1 – Regional Leadership Dialogue

Topic: *From Aspiration to Accession: What Role Does Higher Education Play in EU Integration?*

- Format: Ministerial panel discussion
- Participants:
 - Zoltán Tanács, Minister of Science and Technology, Hungary (TBC)
 - Prof. Jasna Durakovic, Minister of Education and Science, Bosnia and Herzegovina (confirmed)
 - Dejan Vuk Stankovic, Minister of Education, Serbia (confirmed),
 - Anđela Jakšić-Stojanović, Minister of Education, Science and Innovation, Montenegro (TBC)
 - Hajrulla Çeku, Minister of Education, Kosovo (TBC)
 - Moderator: Editor-in-chief, European Voices (TBC)

11:00–11:30 | Coffee Break

11:30–12:30 | Panel 2 – Global Trends & Regional Impact

Topic: *The Changing Landscape of International Higher Education: Challenges & Opportunities for the Western Balkans*

- Speakers:
 - Dr Gjergj Murra, executive director, Western Balkans Fund (confirmed)
 - Cara Skikne, Head of Sector Research and External Communications, Studyportals (confirmed)
 - Prof. Marcin Pałys, Vice President, European University Association (TBC)
 - Prof. Dr Christos Michalakelis, President, Study in Greece (confirmed)
 - Moderator: Prof. István Tarrósy, University of Pécs (confirmed)





12:30–14:00 | Networking Lunch

14:00–15:15 | Parallel Workshops – Session I

Track A: Strategy & Policy

- *How Can Universities Strategically Prepare for EU Membership?*
 - Speakers:
 - Prof. Dr. Nermina Hadžigrahić, Vice-Rector for Digitalization, University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina (confirmed)
 - Marija Filipović-Ožegović, Director of Foundation Tempus, Serbia (confirmed)
 - Danilo Popovich, project manager at Montenegro EU Project Consulting (confirmed),
 - Prof. Valentyna Yakubiv, Rector of the EDUC Alliance associated member from Ukraine, Vasil Stefanyk Carpathian National University (confirmed)

Track B: Curriculum development

- *How to create locally relevant and globally competitive curriculum in the Western Balkans?*
 - Speakers:
 - Cara Skikne, Head of Sector Research and External Communications, Studyportals (confirmed)
 - Dr. Péter Merza, senior lecturer, University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics (confirmed)
 - Dr. Albina Balidemaj, Dean of Faculty, RIT Kosovo (confirmed)
 - Bálint Koós, vice-president of the European Student Union (confirmed)





Track C: Research & Innovation

- *Accessing Horizon Europe and Other EU Research Frameworks*
 - Speakers: Ms Réka Jankovics, Head of International Grants' Department, University of Pécs (confirmed)
 - Prof. Afrim Hoti, University of Prishtina, Kosovo (Confirmed)
 - Prof. Ferenc Miszlivetz, founder and general director, iASK (confirmed)
 - Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes, research engineer, University of Paris Nanterre (TBC)

Track D: The Role of Corporate Partnerships in 21st Century Higher Education

- Glovo
- Huawei
- KONČAR Group
- MVM Group

15:15–15:45 | Coffee Break

15:45–17:00 | Panel 3 – Building Competitive Universities

Topic: *Excellence from the Edge: What Makes a Regional University Globally Competitive?*

- Speakers:
 - Carina Eriksson, Director of International Relations, Karlstadt University, Sweden (confirmed)
 - Dr. Theodoros Papaioannou, Director-General, Study in Greece (confirmed)
 - Judith Azema, Campus France (confirmed)
 - THE data analyst on competitiveness metrics (TBC)





19:00 | Gala Dinner & Cultural Evening

Day 2: Collaboration & Practical Solutions

Theme: *Turning Dialogue into Action: Tools, Networks, and Partnerships*

09:00–09:45 | Fireside Chat

Topic: *The Future University in Central and Eastern Europe: Building and Dismantling the Ivory Pyramid*

- Participants:
 - Dr. Jody Jensen, senior research fellow at the Institute of Political Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (confirmed)
 - Prof. Maurits Van Rooijen, Chief Executive (Academic), Global University Systems (confirmed)
 - Dr. Ivana Stepanovic, research fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg, Hungary (confirmed)
 - Prof. dr. hab. Piotr Jedynek, Rector, Jagiellonian University (TBC)

09:45–11:00 | Parallel Workshops – Session II

Track A: Institutional Development & Governance

- *From Bologna to Beyond: Quality Assurance & Governance Models*
- Speaker: Kathy Charles, Exec. Dean of Learning and Teaching, Nottingham Trent University (confirmed)

Track B: University–Industry Collaboration

- *Skills & Innovation: How to Build Meaningful Public–Private Partnerships*
- Speaker: Prof. Florian Schweigert, former VP at University of Potsdam, CEO of BioAnalyst GmbH (confirmed)





Track C: Student Experience & Employability

- *International Student Support & Career Services: Making Regional Universities Competitive*
- Speaker: Ágnes Tóth, CEO of Prohuman (confirmed)

11:00–11:30 | Coffee Break

11:30–12:30 | Panel 4 – Partnerships in Practice

Topic: *What Makes Regional and Cross-Border Partnerships Work?*

- Format: Case studies & short panel interventions
- Examples:
 - Linda Kapustová Helbichová, Executive Director, International Visegrad Fund (TBC)
 - Prof. Asst. Dr. Rozafa Basha, Vice rector for Internationalization and Academic Exchange, University of Prishtina (confirmed)
 - Slavomir Rudenko, Vice President of the Executive Committee of the Compostela Group of Universities (CGU), Director for International Affairs, Pan-European University (Slovakia) (confirmed)
 - Prof. István Tarrósy, University of Pécs - Pécs' partnerships with the region (confirmed)

12:30–13:00 | Closing Session & Takeaways

- Summary of key insights from moderators
- Remarks by the co-hosts (Pécs & Studyportals)
- Launch or announcement of a possible joint initiative or working group





13:00 | Light Farewell Lunch & Departures

Parallel events:

- **Hungarian Rectors' Conference General Assembly**
- **Meeting of Rectors' Conferences from the region**
- **"A Day of Indigenous Grape Varieties" Conference on Viticulture and Oenology in the Western Balkans**
- **Pannon EGTC (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation) workshop**

